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The Arab Revolutions in Context

Civil Society and Democracy in a Changing Middle East

Edited by Benjamin Isakhan,
Fethi Mansouri and Shahram Akbarzadeh

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The 2011 Bahrain uprising

Its sources, impact and lessons

Matthew Gray[1]

While the most striking protests of the 2010–11 Arab Spring were in North Africa, few states have been untouched by popular protests or the threat of them. In the Arabian Gulf, Bahrain witnessed an extensive uprising in February and March 2011 that only ended after being violently suppressed by Bahraini security forces, backed by Saudi and Emirati troops, and combined with a modest promise of regime consultation with opposition figures. Bahrain's experience with the unrest of 2011 is politically significant in and of itself, and affords lessons for both regimes and populations on the mechanics and dynamics of a 'soft' or co-optative form of autocratic rule. Bahrain, despite its tiny physical size, is also of crucial importance to the Gulf sub-region and the US role there.

This chapter will consider these elements in scholarly perspective through reference to the major approaches explaining Gulf politics and patterns of rule. The argument is that there are problems and social dynamics that are specific to Bahrain and which make the sources of its protests unique—most obviously the issues of sect and the regime's experiments with a pluralisation of autocratic rule since 1999, along with some international aspects—beyond these, however, there are also several generic explanations for the Bahraini protests and their impact, including political failings, broken promises of reform and perceived unfairness in the regime's rentier co-optation of society.

The context of Bahrain's 2011 protests

There is a well-established history of protest and uprising in Bahrain. Popular calls for political participation of various sorts have been a feature of its politics since the 1920s.[2] Strikes and protests occurred after the suspension of the 1973 constitution in 1975, following political strains between Emir Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa and an increasingly activist parliament. As state-Shia tensions grew after the 1978–79 Iranian revolution, there were periods of significant Shia protest, including in December 1994 following the arrest of a leading cleric, Sheikh Ali Salman. This began the 1994–99 'revolt', dominated by Shia (but still involving some Sunni protesters) and characterised by cycles of protest and repression under the Emir, Sheikh Isa, and which only ended with his death in March 1999.[3]

The subsequent period following the ascension of Sheikh Isa's son, Emir Hamad, was one of optimism and reformism, as initially the new Emir was less repressive than his father, and promised substantial political reform.[4] These promises would ultimately prove disappointing to most Bahrainis, who voted in 2001 for a program of reform that was to have included a return to the (revised) 1973 constitution, an expansion of parliamentary powers and other changes. In early 2002, however, Hamad unilaterally introduced reforms that pleased few and which were not what most had presumed the 2001 vote to have endorsed. These included: the introduction of a new constitution, redrafted and significantly different to the 1973 document; the creation of a new bicameral parliament with a powerful appointed upper house to counter the elected lower chamber; and the change of the Emir's own title to 'King' (because it purportedly smacked less of absolutism than 'emir').

The 2002 reforms were not without merit or substance, however, for the 2002 elections stemming from Hamad's reforms were the first such polls in a generation (since those after the 1973 constitution came into effect), and reforms such as the abolition of the state security courts and a repeal of the law that directed them was a genuine

and substantial political reform.[5] However, few Bahrainis were pleased, and many remained suspicious of the new king's motives.[6] The Sunni population had wanted a return to the liberal 1973 constitution with few changes, and the Shia had hoped for changes to their community's standing and an end to the discrimination they faced.

The parliamentary elections of 2002, 2006 and 2010 that occurred under the new constitutional system were only modestly successful. In all cases, they were sufficiently gerrymandered to ensure a Sunni majority (if barely) in the lower house,[7] despite the Shia constituting roughly 70 per cent of the citizenry, while the appointed upper house, with the power to veto or amend legislation sent to it, guaranteed the regime's wishes could be implemented, even against the will of the lower chamber. The 2010 polls, which may come to be seen as the start of the protests, were especially problematic and convinced many Bahrainis, especially Shia, that Hamad was little different to the emirs before him and that his reform promises were ultimately hollow.

The 2011 protests in brief

The 2011 Bahraini uprising was, in its timing, a product of the Arab Spring that began in Tunisia in December 2010, and then spread to Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria and elsewhere in early to mid-2011. In terms of source, however, the protests had been brewing in Bahrain's sectarian problems, state-society relationship and changing political economy, and its monarchy's neo-patrimonial and autocratic nature. The 2011 protests commenced with small-scale gatherings,[8] which expanded to a large protest that was planned for 14 February. The main Shia party, al-Wifaq, was involved in the planning, but at this stage the protests focussed on economic policy, corruption, human rights issues and other dynamics, even if sectarian issues such as constitutional reform, electoral unfairness and the naturalisation of foreign Sunni were issues too.

The 14 February protests were seen as a threat to the regime in part because they were overtly modelled on those in Tunisia and Egypt, but especially because the protestors called for new parliamentary powers to investigate the regime's past conduct. The first response was co-optation: on 11 February the King offered each Bahraini family the sum of BD1000 (about US$2600), supposedly as a gift but widely assumed to be in response to the planned protests. Yet the 14 February protests went ahead, and thereafter the protests quickly expanded. Almost immediately there was confrontation between security forces and protestors. On 15 February the protests clustered around the now famous Pearl Roundabout and having gained momentum, prompted the security forces to seize the Roundabout and lock down the centre of the capital, al-Manama, on 17 and 18 February. On 19 February, however, the security services pulled back from the Pearl Roundabout, reportedly on government orders and presumably as an attempt by King Hamad to take a more conciliatory approach to the protests.[9] Hamad also offered other concessions at this time, including the release of political prisoners and promises of negotiations with the protesters.

The momentum remained with the protests, however, and by 22 February the size of the protestor numbers had grown, reportedly to some 100 000 people; if true, this figure would represent about a quarter of the adult population—an enormous figure with dramatic political implications for regime legitimacy. In late February the King again tried to appease the protestors, to no avail, and the sit-in at the Pearl Roundabout continued. By early March, Sunni–Shia tensions reached the point of (albeit small-scale) violence and on 3 March the first major sectarian clash occurred. It was broken up by security forces and followed by similar ad hoc sectarian clashes. In March the protests seemed increasingly sectarian-based, especially after a union of unlicensed Shia parties was formed on 8 March and called for the abolition of the monarchy and the creation of a democratic republic.[10] The implications of a true democracy, given the enormous Shia demographic majority, are obvious.

On 14 March, the regime, with backing from allied Arab Gulf governments, began an all-encompassing suppression of the protests. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) deployed troops from its *Peninsula Shield* force to assist the Bahraini government and around 1200 troops from Saudi Arabia and 500 from the UAE also entered Bahrain.[11] Over the next few days, the regime completely subdued and repressed the protests; on 15 March the King declared a state of emergency and protestors were forcibly removed from the Pearl Roundabout. On 18 March the Pearl Monument in the centre of the roundabout was demolished, key opposition figures were arrested

(including the prominent head of the trans-sectarian Haqq Movement, Hassan Mushaymaa) and a number of protestors were injured and killed.[12] Further attempts to organise protests or similar actions were suppressed quickly and forcefully and the security services were authorised to break up gatherings, dismantle groups (including legal political parties) and make arrests under State of Emergency provisions.

What then followed was a regime attempt to combine repression and co-optation. On the one hand the regime reverted to subjugation to reassert its authority, including the arrest of key figures in the protests and hundreds of dismissals of state employees who had (supposedly) protested. A handful was tried for more serious offences, including capital offences, in military courts.[13] Censorship, publishing restrictions, curbs on civil society groups' activities and various autocratic methods were used. At the same time, the regime continued to talk of reform and liberalisation, even taking some modest steps in this direction, including in July 2011 when the government engaged in consultations with key opposition figures.[14] How genuine the regime was remained widely contested.[15]

The sources of the protests: sectarianism, rentierism and political failings

Scholars and observers are likely to be debating the sources of the Bahraini protests for years to come, driven by the competing evidence about the relative importance of sect, political economy and state-society dynamics as explanatory factors. To some extent all three of these contributed to the protests, and each is worth assessing individually.

To many observers the dynamics of Bahraini politics are determined above all by sect, and the Sunni–Shia dynamic in Bahrain has been important since the 1978–79 Iranian revolution, which caused considerable fear among the Sunni Arab rulers of the Gulf; a fear seemingly confirmed and certainly reinforced in Bahrain by the failed 1981 attempt by a Shia opposition party to oust the ruling family.[16] Yet sect was only a relatively minor issue prior to the 1980s. There is, as Louër has shown, a long Shia history in Bahrain, which has more recently been idealised and mythologised.[17] In practical terms, the sectarian divisions of the past few decades are the result of

regime mistrust and discrimination towards the Shia, though they also stem from more complex discriminatory patterns, social distinctions and biases often simplistically labelled as sectarianism.

The discrimination is well established: the Shia suffer from a range of both formalised and unofficial discriminatory practices. At the official level, parliamentary seats are gerrymandered, as noted, preventing Shia parties or affiliated independents from controlling the (lower) chamber despite winning a majority of votes. Almost as controversially, the Shia also see the regime as acting against them and their interests by naturalising foreign Sunnis[18] and thus seeking to alter the sectarian mix of the Kingdom.

The Shia are also discriminated against and disadvantaged in more practical, day-to-day ways.[19] In public sector employment, senior or politically sensitive positions are essentially off-limits to Shia. This is especially important given that the state is the largest single employer and prestige and security come from holding a public sector job. Likewise, the security apparatus and related work is in practice closed to the Shia. Even obtaining basic positions, beyond the most unpleasant and unskilled jobs, is difficult. Other discrimination occurs in private sector employment, too, in areas such as educational admissions and in Shia access to publicly funded housing. The absence of protections such as a minimum wage make matters worse still for working-class Shia and many live in actual poverty, not just relative deprivation.

That said, sect is only part of the equation and is often exaggerated or oversimplified by observers, as Wright has noted (if conversely overstated).[20] There are very wealthy, favoured Shia families who are central to the business-government relationship and who enjoy elite status similar to large Sunni merchants. More broadly the Shia still have some opportunities and, despite the discrimination, the regime has nonetheless spent large sums on social programs and economic diversification. A considerable amount of social spending is reaching the Shia population, even if they still face discrimination in the realms of state employment or in obtaining some specific services.

Second, the co-optative conduct of the rentier state has been another source of popular displeasure with the regime. Bahrain is a rentier-based political economy, where the majority of the state's income is derived not from taxation but from externally derived

income (specifically oil and gas rents). As anticipated by rentier state theory,[21] the regime has been able to use its allocative power to buy a semi-autonomy from society via its purchase of a (largely foreign) repressive security apparatus and to co-opt opposition groups and figures and society at large. In so doing it avoids a democratic bargain with the populus.

One of the myths about Bahrain is that it is no longer 'rentier'. While over the longer term its oil output is declining from a peak in 1977 and, at about 50 000 barrels per day in the 2000s is modest compared to most Gulf States, the revenues earned by the regime are significant given Bahrain's small population. Oil rents dominate the state budget: in the past they have typically been around two-thirds of revenue, and at the height of the 2003–08 oil boom were 77 per cent.[22] Despite Bahrain also possessing a more diversified economy and thus being seen by many observers—inaccurately—as being a 'post-oil' economy, in terms of regime reliance on rent, it is essentially as rentier as any other Gulf state, as shown in Figure 5.1.

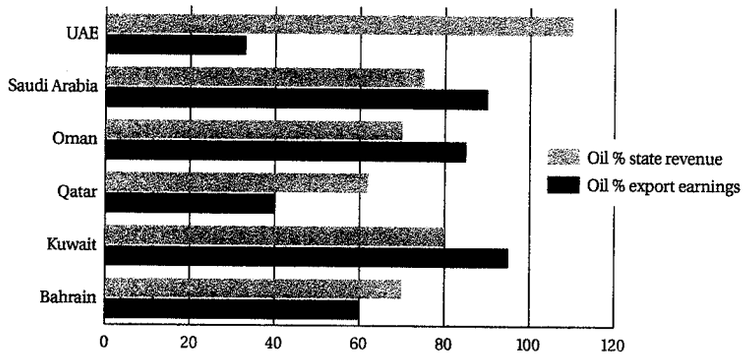

Figure 5.1: Rentierism in the Arab Gulf States (2007 figures).

Source: Derived from figures in Hvidt, 'Economic Diversification in the Arab Gulf States...', p. 43 and data extracted from http://data.worldbank.org/indicator and author's estimates based on various media sources.

The failing of the Bahraini regime, however, appears to be that it never understood that regime maintenance and stability requires more than oil-purchased co-optation and repression. Above all, a rentier state is never *completely* autonomous, something rentier theory once assumed[23] but which is no longer widely accepted. A regime still has to build legitimacy and either repress or co-opt opposition in other ways.

The first response of the regime to the initial stirrings of protest in February 2011 was classic rentierism: it offered financial co-optation, as noted, on 11 February and again later that month, and in recognition perhaps of its particular sectarian and economic dynamics, it also offered other support to poorer families. Such crude attempts to induce the population may have worked in periods of relative calm and growth, but they prove less effective once unrest has commenced. That the regime only offered concessions when it felt forced to do so by events—and only economic concessions, not the political ones increasingly demanded—is suggestive of a regime that is rentier, partly autonomous, but still at risk because ordinarily it under-allocates and misallocates its rents.[24]

The other aspect of rentierism is repression.[25] Prior to 2011, repression in Bahrain was nearly always discreet and sometimes only implied; the Kingdom was a 'soft' autocracy where co-optation was preferred and repression was used in limited, if regular, doses. Since the 2011 protests, however, the regime has increased its repressiveness, presumably both to punish and suppress those who challenged the regime directly, and, fearing further unrest, *pour encourager les autres* (to encourage the others). Examples include the arrest and dismissal of government workers already mentioned and, by some reports, human rights abuses of people in custody. The freedom of the media has been curtailed through the forced resignation of some journalists and self-censorship by others. Such responses under societal pressure are typical of the rentier state, but if done too brutally or clumsily will only temporarily deter opposition and not address its sources or grievances.

Also related to rentierism (but not conditional upon it) is what Ian Bremmer has called a 'new state capitalism'.[26] The term captures the novel or modified elements of state capitalism that became common in the 1990s and 2000s in some states, including Bahrain and other Gulf monarchies. It is markedly different to the state capitalism of Arab republics in the immediate post-independence period. Under new state capitalism, the state remains the leading economic actor in an economy where market mechanisms usually set prices and the private sector plays a sizeable but highly regulated and

restricted role. The Gulf states have long been state capitalist in this way, with rulers seeking to develop new economic opportunities for themselves and their neo-patrimonial clients and allies.[27]

While Dubai is often held up as the archetypal new state capitalist, Bahrain is adopting many elements of this form of capitalism, too. The Al-Khalifa family owns some of the major firms in the economy, regulates many sectors of the economy (especially strategic ones such as defence, transport and communications) and nurtures merchants whom it wishes to co-opt through state contracts and joint ventures. At the same time it has opened up the economy to trade and foreign investment (especially in finance and tourism), globalised business in areas where the state is not dominant, and eased business processes and 'red tape'. This all is based on the assumption that more active and entrepreneurial state capitalism can assist in providing state longevity, both through the creation of new forms of wealth and as an alternative to politically risky economic neo-liberalism.[28] It also provides a tactical advantage, where rentier dynamics can be extended into wider commercial settings, for example, by providing opportunities for compliant businesspeople to gain wealth as middlemen, and where others can make money through land and stock speculation.

Table 5.1: Bahrain national accounts: GDP at constant prices, 2006–2010

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010[a]
GDP (constant prices, BD million)	4109.1	4453.6	4734.5	4880.5	5100.2
Change (%)	6.7	8.4	6.3	3.1	4.5
Oil	595.9	602.6	605.1	600.3	611.2
Manufacturing	663.3	706.5	757.9	750.5	836.4
Transport and communications	354.5	376.4	386.4	431.3	458.5
Trade	342.1	357.1	369.9	331.9	350.6
Real estate and business activities	407.1	434.1	466.8	425.9	435.7
Finance	1091.2	1192.2	1258.8	1205.1	1255.6
Government services	586.2	630.7	689.2	724.7	747.8
GDP per capita (BD)	**6205.9**	**6683.0**	**7527.1**	**6260.5**	**6678.9**

[a] Provisional figures.
Source: Central Bank of Bahrain, *Economic Indicators*, no. 31, March 2011.

Table 5.1 illustrates the nature of Bahrain's economy, especially when combined with Figure 5.1 earlier in this section. Thus, Bahrain is clearly a rentier state in terms of its revenue, but it also has a more diverse, state capitalist structure in the non-oil economy (in fact, it is the most diverse economy in the GCC). However, the role of the state in the economy is still disproportionately large compared to most developed, extractive economies: note the size of the government in GDP based solely on oil and government services. This is further evidence of the underlying rentier basis of the state-society relationship and is another example of how soft (economic) power is applied by a (pluralised) autocratic state to broaden the economic base of the regime and discreetly regulate or influence the allocation of wealth and economic opportunities.

The third element behind the protests has been the ways in which the Bahraini regime has mismanaged its relationship with its citizenry. As discussed above, the most obvious manifestation of this has been political, where promises as discussed have never been delivered satisfactorily. The regime handled the electoral process poorly, and subsequently delivered a strong signal to the people that their parliament is merely a co-optative institution with a veneer of political liberalism designed for regime maintenance rather than a body which might genuinely contribute to a representative political process. The presence of an appointed, rather than an elected, upper house underpins this power, ensuring the regime can block unwelcome legislation.[29] This, too, is a feature of rentier governments: they introduce tightly controlled reforms towards what Brumberg calls 'pluralized autocracy',[30] in which the state settles into a permanent mode of pluralised but not democratic or transitional rule. It is '... not just a "survival strategy" adopted by authoritarian regimes, but rather a *type* of political system whose institutions, rules, and logic defy any linear model of democratisation.'[31] Bahrain's sectarian situation, where a minority Sunni regime controls a majority Shia population, makes this model attractive. In periods of relative stability, pluralisation of an autocratic system provides enough of an outlet for popular frustration and just enough room for consultation and co-optation with favoured elites, but it is not a process by which the Shia could genuinely build an independent power base within state institutions or seize power from the Al-Khalifas.

A subsequent question is where precisely the Bahraini liberalised autocratic model fits with the 2011 protests? Did it help cause them by raising Shia hopes of political change? This seems to be the view of the main Sunni hardliners such as the King's uncle, Prime Minister Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, and the Interior Minister Rashid bin Abdullah Al-Khalifa. Conversely, did parliamentary politics in fact minimise the protests' effect, as some reformers (possibly even King Hamad) would argue? The future of parliamentarism in Bahrain depends on how this question is resolved within the elite. While the regime will continue to use the legislature and other institutions as symbols of its spurious commitment to reform and as a mechanism for regime maintenance, any future liberalisation of the legislature or expansion in its powers is unlikely. In the absence of further major protests the legislature is likely to continue as it has in the 2000s—as a controlled co-optative body—because of the ease with which the parliament's role can be adjusted by the regime. When the appearance of reform is required, parliamentary powers can be gradually increased, whereas if parliament oversteps its regime-imposed boundaries, its powers can be curtailed easily and rapidly. Even if other factors are relevant to Bahrain's future stability—the treatment of the Shia and their perception of their social role, for example, or the Saudi role in suppressing future uprisings—the King's strategy most likely will be to retain parliament as a consultative body with very limited actual power.

The impact and lessons of the protests

What, then, are the ultimate impact and lessons of the 2011 protests for the regime, the protestors and observers? Several observations can be made covering the dynamics of sectarianism, the rentier regime, economic neo-liberalism and international relations in the Gulf region/states/countries.

While sectarianism is an issue in Bahrain and other Gulf states, the limitations of viewing Gulf politics through a sectarian prism need to be acknowledged. As noted, there was no single source behind Bahrain's 2011 protests. Claims that the unrest represents a stark and aggressive sectarian divide are overstated, even if sect does partly inform Bahraini identity and politics and the Shia do have legitimate grievances against the Al-Khalifa family (as do many Sunni). Bahrain's Sunni elite possess a particular legitimacy deficit by virtue of their minority sectarian status and especially because of the scope and depth of their discrimination against the Shia. However, the protests also stem from governance issues and dynamics as much as from sectarianism.

The Bahraini unrest provides further support for the central arguments of rentier state theory (RST). The implications of events in Bahrain are that the core rentierism ideas are valid in terms of how the *mechanisms* of control work under autocratic regimes with critical amounts of externally derived wealth. The Al-Khalifa follow the rentier assumptions almost to the letter: they adopt neo-patrimonial webs; they co-opt wider elements of society (but not society overall, as in some other small Gulf *über*-rentiers); they rush to increase co-optation at times of social unrest or criticism; and they combine co-optation with significant if usually discreet repression.

However, two further comments can be made, less emphatically supportive of rentier theory. The first is that, useful as RST may be for understanding the *mechanisms* of control in Bahrain and elsewhere, it is not a convincing explanation at the *structural* level for the political system as a whole. The regime is not as autonomous as rentier theorists would argue, nor are rents sufficient to buy absolute or overwhelming popular support. In fact the 2011 protests have demonstrated that, in the face of popular displeasure, rents by no means guarantee regime survival. Thus rentierism can explain how autocrats control and manoeuvre politically, but is less useful in explaining how autocrats actually attained power and why they have constructed the systems of politics that they have.

The Bahraini experience contains lessons for observers of economic liberalisation programs and neo-liberal reform in the Arab world. There is *some* scope for seeing Bahrain's economic reforms in the 2000s as a move to greater marketisation. The fact that there has long been a skilled, experienced and relatively open private sector in the Kingdom makes such reforms attractive and, arguably, easier than otherwise to implement. To describe Bahrain's economy as a 'success story',[32] however, is to misunderstand the precise nature of its political economy. Economic reform and diversification has occurred within a (new) state capitalist framework. And yet the state remains the most powerful economic actor in the country, supported

at the elite level by key merchant families. Economic reforms have occurred on the state's terms, and no real economic or political power has been ceded by the ruling family or key business elites. Economic liberalisation has been a partial method through which to diversify the non-oil sector and broaden the economic base of the regime and Bahrain's experience (along with that of other Gulf states) shows that selective, often substantial, reforms can occur, but without a transition to a neo-liberal economy.

Fourth and finally, several sub-regional Arab dynamics are now clearer after the Bahraini protests. The GCC has been starkly revealed as a security bloc rather than an economic one. The Saudi-led military intervention in Bahrain was ultimately about a group of conservative Sunni Arab regimes propping up one of its own in the face of popular and especially Shia unrest. The implications of the calls by some opposition figures for full democratic reform and republicanism in Bahrain were not lost on other GCC leaders. It is worth remembering that the Saudi regime was nervous about disturbances among its own Shia minority and in February 2011 the Saudi monarch, King Abdullah, was quick to dispense largesse to his people as protests in the region accelerated.[33] It is also notable that the GCC also provided Bahrain and Oman with about US$20 billion in assistance for social spending—a massive sum in those small states—to boost the two regimes.[34]

Further supporting this was the almost ludicrous offer to Morocco and Jordan in June 2011 to become GCC members, despite their geographical distance from the Gulf.[35] The move to include these more moderate and inclusive Arab monarchies was clearly designed to allay popular discontent towards Sunni leaderships. The threat of Shia-dominated Iran and its growing influence in the region following the 2003 Iraq War was also crucial, since in GCC eyes it was an emboldened strategic actor. It was seen as possessing the ability and, by some, the intent to foment unrest in the Gulf. Expanding the GCC to other conservative monarchies, rather than to republics such as Yemen which had long sought entry into the council, would provide consolidation, strategic depth and a coordinated diplomatic voice.[36] The GCC intervention also revealed the Saudi dominance of the GCC—always the case—but the inclusion of UAE forces was interesting. Most likely it was designed to send a message of joint self-defence, to discredit the Bahraini protestors, and to send a message to Iran and to Arab Shia everywhere that the uprising was viewed as a challenge to multiple states' individual and collective security.

More widely, the impact of the protests remain uncertain. There is, of course, the important question of US–Bahraini relations, given that Bahrain has been a key regional ally for the US and headquarters for the US Fifth Fleet. However, there is scant evidence of any profound change in that relationship. During his speech on the Arab Spring on 19 May 2011 US President Barack Obama called on Bahrain's leadership to engage with opposition forces but US pressure seems unlikely to have much effect. The Bahraini regime, backed by the Saudis, will think above all of the survival of the regime, not diplomatic ideals, and is most likely to engage in enough dialogue with opposition forces to assuage US pressure. Nor is the US likely to undermine its own strategic interests by abandoning Bahrain as an ally, especially since concerns about the longer-term role of Iran in the Gulf will probably dominate US strategic thinking on the Gulf in coming years.

Bahrain's future: both instability and regime durability?

Ultimately, the 2011 protests demonstrate that the Bahraini regime is both unpopular and durable. Provided the regime can manage the dynamics of oil rents and resist the temptation to overly rely on either co-optation or repression for regime maintenance, it is likely to survive and perhaps also control popular calls for political reform. The pluralisation of the autocratic political order since 1999 and the improvement of some political conditions suggests that King Hamad's relative moderateness and willingness to undertake at least some basic political reform are both genuine and promising for the long-term survival of the regime. However, if the country were to come under genuine threat of revolution, the regime now has much greater certainty that it can count on GCC intervention to ensure its continuation.

Thus the maintenance of the Al-Khalifa dynasty depends on both domestic and external sub-regional dynamics. The survival of the King and the current political order is above all a domestic matter in that it is rentier dynamics, the politics of sectarianism and the

mechanisms of pluralised autocracy that will dictate if and when future protests arise and, to a large extent, whether they gain a critical mass. Should this happen, Bahrain's future becomes much more of a regional concern—especially for Saudi Arabia, a bellwether—and if the events of February–March 2011 were to be repeated, the possibility of the regime being again propped up by Riyadh is great.

Indeed, the regime will face substantial tests in the future. The state's rents are likely to fluctuate wildly and population structures and sectarian dynamics will probably change over time. If the King mishandles or fails to address the grievances of the population, state-society relations will come under dangerous and potentially violent strain.[37] As a worst-case scenario, the Shia could disengage from peaceful politics, in which case a lengthy sectarian uprising or violent rejoinder to the Al-Khalifa regime remains a possibility. At the same time, the Gulf is gradually but profoundly changing, as Saudi Arabia and Iran become more competitive, as global oil and gas dynamics shift, and as new unorthodox security issues such as climate change, immigration, food and water security, and demographic pressures emerge. If Bahrain's underlying political issues are not dealt with promptly, it's likely they will be amplified by such new and expanding security threats.

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Notes

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2 Bahri, 'The Socioeconomic Foundations of the Shiite Opposition in Bahrain', pp. 129–32.
3 International Crisis Group, 'Bahrain's Sectarian Challenge', p. 2.
4 The details here are mostly from Parolin, 'Reweaving the Myth of Bahrain's Parliamentary Experience', especially pp. 22–36.
5 International Crisis Group, 'Bahrain's Sectarian Challenge', p. 5.
6 ibid., p. 5.
7 This is mostly done through the allocation of a disproportionate number of seats to more sparsely populated majority Sunni areas of the country. See the 2010 poll: National Democratic Institute, 'Election Stories Unfold on a Map', p. 1, 4.
8 BBC News, 'Timeline: Bahrain'.
9 *The New York Times*, 'Protestors Take Bahrain Square as Forces Leave'.
10 International Crisis Group, 'Popular Protests in North Africa and the Middle East', p. 18.
11 *The New York Times*, 'Saudi Troops Enter Bahrain to Help Put Down Unrest'.
12 *The Economist*, 'A Gulf State That Is An Odd Man Out'; 'Bahrain crushes protests, draws U.S. criticism'.
13 *The New York Times*, 'Bahrain Says It Will End State of Emergency'.
14 *The Economist*, 'Shoot First, Then Talk'.
15 *The New York Times*, 'Talks Begin in Effort to Repair Bahrain Rift'; *Reuters*, 'Bahrain Opposition Fears Reform Talks Not Serious'.
16 This point is made in International Crisis Group, 'Popular Protests in North Africa and the Middle East (III)', pp. 9–10. The exact nature of Iranian involvement in the coup attempt remains contested.
17 Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, especially pp. 12–33.
18 International Crisis Group, 'Bahrain's Sectarian Challenge', pp. 7–8.
19 ibid., pp. 7–9.
20 Wright, 'Generational Change and Elite-Driven Reforms in the Kingdom of Bahrain', pp. 8–9.
21 This is a summary of rentier theory only; for more detail see, among others: Moore, 'Rents and Late Development in the Arab World'; Schwarz, 'The Political Economy of State-Formation in the Arab Middle East', pp. 599–621.
22 Saif, 'The Oil Boom in the GCC Countries, 2002–2008', p. 3.
23 See for example the early rentier literature such as Beblawi, 'The Rentier State in the Arab World'; and Luciani, 'Allocation vs. Production States'.
24 Noreng, 'The Predicament of the Gulf Rentier State', pp. 13–5.
25 Ross, 'Does Oil Hinder Democracy?', pp. 335–6.
26 Bremmer, *The End of the Free Market*.
27 Schlumberger, 'Structural Reform, Economic Order, and Development', pp. 622–49.
28 Bremmer, *The End of the Free Market*, especially pp. 51–81.
29 Brumberg, 'Beyond Liberalization?', p. 49.
30 —— 'The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy', pp. 56–68.
31 ibid., p. 56.
32 Looney, 'The Omani and Bahraini Paths to Development', pp. 3–4 and *passim* throughout.
33 *The New York Times*, 'In Saudi Arabia, Royal Funds Buy Peace for Now'.
34 —— 'Gulf Council Reaches Out to Morocco and Jordan'.
35 —— 'The New Club of Arab Monarchies'; *The Economist*, 'A club fit for kings'.
36 Lynch, 'The What Cooperation Council?'
37 *The Economist*, 'The Loathing Persists'.