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BAHRAIN FACT SHEET January 2012

THE MONARCHY

- The Al Khalifa family has ruled this Persian Gulf island for 229 years, essentially since the inception of the United States.¹
- Bahrain's Prime Minister has been in power for 41 years, longer than Egypt's Mubarak and Libya's Ghaddafi.²
- The PM is the longest serving unelected prime minister in the world, during whose terms 8 American presidents have served as well as 24 Italian Prime Ministers.³
- Nepotism is a major feature of the monarchy in Bahrain, with top posts in almost every executive branch being held by members of the Al Khalifa family.⁴
- Corruption is rampant in Bahrain, with the ruling clan owning lands and businesses totaling billions of dollars, while much of the country lives in poverty.⁵

THE UPRISING

- The Bahraini people have called for basic human rights and the establishment of a democratic system of government.⁶
- In a country of about 525,000 citizens, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry reports that between February 14 and April 15, 2011:⁷
 - At least **35** deaths by the use of firearms and torture were attributed to the Ministry of Interior and Bahrain Defense Force.
 - Approximately **3,000** unlawful arrests were made of pro-democratic protesters, including faith leaders, political leaders, medical professionals, journalists, teachers, athletes, and peaceful civilians.
 - **559** formal complaints of torture were brought forth to testify what Human Rights Watch has called “a systematic and comprehensive crackdown to punish and intimidate government critics and to end dissent root and branch.”
 - Approximately **4,000** individuals were wrongfully dismissed from their jobs, from both the public and private sectors.
 - **53** places of worship were demolished.
- The 559 formal complaints of torture included, but are not limited to, rape, severe beating, extended blindfolding and handcuffing, burning, whipping, electrocution, sleep deprivation, hanging by wrists during interrogation, forced prolonged standing, extremely unhygienic state of confinement, threats of sexual abuse and/or death

against detainees and their family members, forced confessions to support false criminal allegations, and violation of due process.⁸

- Although the February 14th uprising did not come out of a vacuum and was preceded by political unrest over several decades, the current situation is by far the most volatile the country has ever seen.⁹
- The regime has a long, documented history of torture, summary executions, and brutal violations of human rights.¹⁰
- The protests in Bahrain, unlike many of their ‘Arab Spring’ counterparts, were generally categorized as peaceful and non-violent by major human rights groups, but were faced with brutal aggression to quell the movement.¹¹

CURRENT SITUATION

- At least 700 detainees remain in prison for opposing the government’s brutality. Human rights groups report that wrongful arrests and torture of detainees continue to take place.¹²
- Tear gas canisters fired by security forces have killed peaceful Bahrainis during demonstrations since the release of the BICI report. These canisters have been produced and sold by the United States to the government of Bahrain.¹³
- During protests that have continued since the uprising began, government forces have maintained violent riot control techniques against peaceful protestors, including firing shotgun rounds, sound bombs, tear gas, and rubber bullets.
- **The BICI found no link between an external entity, such as the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Bahraini opposition movement. The demands of the protesters are rooted in domestic concerns.**¹⁴

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the Saudi military intervention and the ensuing violent crackdown, the human rights situation is much more complicated. What has worked to the benefit of everyone, however, is international pressure to ease the tension. The following are just some of the actions the United States can take, using our support to the monarchy and presence of the Navy’s Fifth Fleet as leverage, to ensure long-term regional stability without affecting the political dynamics in the country:

- Co-sponsor legislation such as House Joint Resolution 80 and its accompanying Senate Joint Resolution 28 to limit a proposed \$53 million arms sale to Bahrain until the Department of State affirms that human rights reform has been made.
- Pressure the regime to release all prisoners of conscience and political detainees.
- Push the authorities to drop all charges against detainees, including political and religious leaders who enjoy a wide following in Bahrain.
- Make these statements publicly to increase the pressure as well as win much needed support from the people of Bahrain who are growing increasingly disappointed with the US position.

RISKS INVOLVED WITH INACTION:

Since Bahrain is a strategic country as far as US security and commerce are concerned, we need stability there. The presence of the US Navy's Fifth Fleet further emphasizes the need for a more stable situation in Bahrain. However, the regime's actions have only jeopardized our position there. Insofar as US interests are concerned, we foresee the following risks associated with a lack of direct involvement there:

1. The alienation of the United States and a rise in public resentment towards it as it is allied with the repressive regime and, subsequently, seen as opposed to the aspirations of the people who demand more freedoms and a democratic system of government.
2. The above could easily leave a political vacuum and cause a shift in the nation towards regimes seen as more sympathetic to the rights of Bahraini people, such as Iran.
3. The continued, perpetual crackdown on the majority Shias can potentially have repercussions in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere in the Middle East and throw the entire region into a spiral of violence and bloodshed.

ENDNOTES:

¹ "Bahrain Country Profile," BBC, June 4, 2011

² Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Dark clouds over Bahrain," Foreign Policy, September 6, 2011

³ Ben Birnbaum, "Top Sunni: P.M. should mull quitting after crisis," The Washington Times, August 18, 2011

⁴ F. Gregory Gause III, "Why reform in the Gulf monarchies is a family feud," Foreign Policy, March 4, 2011

⁵ Rania Oteify and Firouz Sedarat, "Bahrain sacks minister in money laundering probe," Reuters, March 23, 2010

⁶ Michael Slackman, "Protesters in Bahrain Demand More Changes," The New York Times, February 25, 2011

⁷ Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, "Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry," November 23, 2011

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Thomas Friedman, "Pray. Hope. Prepare." The New York Times, April 12, 2011

¹⁰ "World Report 2011," Human Rights Watch, January 2011

¹¹ "Bahrain must protect peaceful protesters from torture," Amnesty International, February 22, 2011

¹² Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, "Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry," November 23, 2011

¹³ Nicholas Kristof, "Repressing Democracy with American Arms," New York Times, December 17, 2011

¹⁴ Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, "Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry," November 23, 2011