

The Arab Spring in the Arabian Peninsula

Devin Entrikin- **Yemen**
Amy Grinsfelder- **Saudi Arabia**
Therese Postel- **Bahrain**
Athina Doutis- **Qatar**

Professor Tom O'Donnell, Fall 2011

The Arab Spring in the Arabian Peninsula

The Arab Spring, which started in Algeria and quickly toppled regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, has left no government in the Middle East untouched. There have been a few constants regarding these protests in the Middle East. Although nothing is written in stone, governments with copious amounts of oil and Arab monarchies have been able to avoid regime change up until the present. The Gulf region provides us with an important microcosm of the protests that have swept through the region thus far.

President Ali Abdullah Saleh, a dictator with complicit backing from the United States, has pledged to transfer power peacefully the GCC transition deal yet the agreement. Tribal, regional and sectarian schisms within the country have existed for decades and remain potential spoilers for peace. Yemen, perched on the edge of civil war, pushes forward cautiously into the post-Saleh era. The opposition movement remains divided between the political elite and the youth in the streets whose powerful collective voice and calls for reform stand the risk of being silenced.

In Saudi Arabia, an oil-laden country has used its wealth to ameliorate grievances within the country. Lately, in the oil-rich eastern provinces, there have been growing protests shaking the regime. Coupled with a rising women's movement within the country, Saudi Arabia is on the edge of facing wide scale protests. Saudi Arabia occupies a place of the utmost importance for the West and this regime will not fall, but the potential for bloodshed is great.

In Bahrain, a Sunni monarchy has attempted to balance tensions with a Shia majority for decades. Bahrain has attempted to appease its citizens with money, but the state still has witnessed large, ongoing protests against the regime. Armed forces from other Gulf countries

have entered Bahrain to quell the protests that are allegedly fermented by Iran. Despite a violent crackdown coupled with a few attempted concessions on the part of the government, protests continue to grow in size and strength. Bahrain is a potential location for a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia and has major geostrategic implications for the Gulf and the West.

Qatar has had the opposite experience of these three nations. Oil rich with a small population, Qatar has played a leading interventionist role in the Arab Spring. Qatar's role as the mouthpiece for the Arab Spring, because of its state run media Al-Jazeera, cannot be understated. Most importantly, Qatar has provided a model for Arab intervention in other states with its role in the Libya intervention.

Throughout this paper, the economic, social, and political divisions that have led to the events of the Arab Spring in each of these countries will be discussed. After this historical analysis, the geostrategic implications of each country's revolution, or lack thereof, will be discussed. The Arabian Peninsula is in crisis and it is unclear where the road will lead.

Yemen Revolt

Devin Entrikin

The uprisings in Yemen, one front in the protest movements that swept through the Arab world in 2011, lifted the country into the public conscious and catalyzed Yemen's previously elusive quest for political transition and reform. This transition process has been met with

resistance by Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh and his loyalist forces resulting in months of civil unrest and political stalemate that only recently took a necessary stride away from the brink of civil war from which it was poised. The November 23rd signing of the Gulf Arab Proposal, a mechanism for transferring power out of the hands of Saleh and into a transitional government, broke the stalemate that gripped the country yet to date remains fragile. The transfer of power has been only been partially implemented with Vice President Abed Rabbuh Mansur al-Hadi officially assuming the office of the Presidency in the coming week.¹ But who were the agents of change that led to the current state of affairs?; What actors and entities shaped the process over the past year? These are the questions that this section aims to answer.

Yemen: A Divided Territory

The Republic of Yemen as a unified entity is a relatively new concept only two decades old as both Ottoman and British interests in South Arabia effectively split Yemen into an Ottoman controlled North and a British Protectorate South. The British and Ottomans entered into a treaty in 1904 that served to officially divide the country, cementing their fates as territories that would experience drastically different paths to unification in 1990.²

North Yemen in the 20th Century

The Ottoman Empire controlled North Yemen on two separate occasions, with their second venture into the region ending with their dissolution after World War I.³ The shift from Ottoman control marked North Yemen's independence as the new country fell under the regime

¹ Jamal al-Jashini, "Yemen Sets Date for Presidential Vote," *The Guardian*, November 26.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/feedarticle/9966594>

² *Carnegie Endowment*, "Chronology History of Key Events in Modern History of South Yemen,"

http://carnegieendowment.org/files/key_events_yemen_history.pdf

³ *BBC*, "Yemen Profile," <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14704951>

of Imam Yahya, who ruled until his death in 1948.⁴ North Yemen remained as an Imamate until 1962, when military figures took over the government and founded the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR). Civil war ensued with Saudi-backed Royalists battling the military contingent attempting to forge a republic with the backing of the Egyptians.⁵ The armed conflict endured for 8 years before a peace agreement was forged and the Yemen Arab Republic became fully realized. Despite the Saudi backing of Royalists and tribes during the civil war, they eventually supported the regime of YAR in 1970, bestowing legitimacy upon the newly independent state.⁶ After a tumultuous period, a military officer named Ali Abdullah Saleh took power in 1978, persevering as the key power figure in Yemen until present day.⁷

The Saleh era in the YAR witnessed border skirmishes between the north and south as well as the discovery of oil in 1984 by the Texas based Hunt Oil Company.⁸ The oil discovery offered a new source of wealth for the chronically poor country and would serve as a source of cooperation between the YAR and People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, the Marxist ruling government in the south, in the lead up to unification.⁹ The increase in revenue from oil rents also provided Saleh with the opportunity to solidify his grip on power through the construction

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ ICG, "Coping with Terrorism in a Fragile State," Middle East Report N*8, January 8, 2003, 3. [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iran%20Gulf/Yemen/Yemen%20Coping%20with%20Terrorism%20and%20Violence%20in%20a%20Fragile%20State.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iran%20Gulf/Yemen/Yemen%20Coping%20with%20Terrorism%20and%20Violence%20in%20a%20Fragile%20State.pdf)

⁶ Ibid., 3.

⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁸ ICG, "Breaking Point: Yemen's Southern Question," Middle East Report N*113, October 20, 2011, 2. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iran%20Gulf/Yemen/114%20Breaking%20Point%20--%20Yemens%20Southern%20Question.pdf>

⁹ Brian Whitaker, "Steps Toward Unification," in *The Birth of Modern Yemen*, Chapter 2 (e-Book: al-bab.com 2009) <http://www.al-bab.com/yemen/birthofmodernyemen/bmy2.htm>

of a patronage network involving payments to influential tribal and religious figures in the country.¹⁰

South Yemen in the 20th Century

The British were primarily interested in the strategic port of Aden as a refueling point for ships bound for India and took control of the port city in the 19th century, maintaining authority in southern Yemen until their coerced withdrawal in 1967.¹¹ Three years after independence from the British, a Marxist government was installed in south, founding the Peoples Democratic Republic of Yemen, the first and only Marxist inspired regime in the Arab World.¹² Under the PDRY, tribalism was outlawed, despite the historically tribal legacy of the territory. Notwithstanding, tribal rivalries persisted and formed the backbone of multiple bouts of violence during the short lived reign of the PDRY.¹³

In 1986, a civil war broke out in an intense yet short-lived conflict between supporters of then Head of State Ali Nasser Muhammed and former President Abd Al-Fatah Isma'il.¹⁴ Despite assassinating Isma'il and much of the Politburo in a preemptive attack, Muhammed was later driven into exile in the YAR along with 30,000 or so of his supporters.¹⁵¹⁶ Due to this crippling

¹⁰ Sara Philips, "What Comes Next in Yemen: Al-Qaeda, the Tribes, and State-building," *Middle East Program*, Number 107, Carnegie Endowment: Washington DC, March 2010, 6.

http://carnegieendowment.org/files/yemen_tribes1.pdf

¹¹ Brian Whitaker, "One Yemen, Two States," in *The Birth of Modern Yemen*, Chapter 1 (e-Book: al-bab.com 2009)

<http://www.al-bab.com/yemen/birthofmodernyemen/bmy1.htm>

¹² Ibid., Chapter 1

¹³ ICG, *Southern Question*, 2.

¹⁴ Mark N. Katz, "Civil Conflict in South Yemen," *Middle East Review*, Fall 1986, 10.

<http://digilib.gmu.edu:8080/jspui/bitstream/1920/3127/1/civil%20conflict%20in%20south%20yemen.pdf>

¹⁵ Katz, *South Yemen*, 10

¹⁶ ICG, *Southern Question*, 2

episode and a stagnant economy, after the weakening of the Soviet Union in the late 80's, the PDRY found unification as an eventual necessity.¹⁷

Yemeni Unification and Civil War

The discovery of oil in the Mar'ib and Shabwa Governorates initially increased tensions between the YAR and PDRY. Due to the placement of the oil basin in the disputed land along the border of the two Yemens as well as the Cold War undertones of the situation, the initial indicators pointed towards renewed conflict. With the American owned Hunt Company developing fields in the North and the Soviet Techno Export Company working the Southern fields both in close proximity to one another, the potential for conflict increased.¹⁸ A military buildup occurred in the region, which compelled the Ta'izz summit meeting in 1988, where President Saleh once again called for steps towards unification.¹⁹ Though PDRY President Ali Salim Al- Beidh deflected questions of unification, Saleh's call acted as a catalyst towards renewal of the process.²⁰

The YAR and PDRY agreed in Ta'izz to demilitarize a 2,200 square kilometer Joint Investment Area along the common border in preparation for oil exploration & development.²¹ The Yemen Company for Investment in Oil and Mineral Resources formed as the primary stakeholder in charge of developing the joint venture.²² This was a significant forward stride in the promotion of economic cooperation between the North and South. As the joint venture developed a relaxation of border controls occurred, which profoundly affected the mobility of

¹⁷ Ibid., 3

¹⁸ Whitaker, *Towards Unification*, Chapter 2

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ ibid

²² ibid

Yemeni's.²³ Over the next two years, the PDRY lost an estimated 250,000 citizens or 10% of its population to the North as a result of the relaxed controls. In addition, the YAR and the PDRY agreed to another massive integration project, linking their separate power grids between Ta'izz and Aden.²⁴

The increased cooperation and the demise of the Soviet Union assisted in compelling the unification of the YAR and PDRY, which became the Republic of Yemen on May 22, 1990.²⁵ The unification brought together two contrasting political systems and found the former YAR on far stronger footing during the bargaining process. In addition to the economic malaise facing the PDRY, the Marxist country had a population one-fifth the size of its counterpart in the North and had just lost 10% of it due to the opening of the border. These factors led to the PDRY agreeing to a hasty unification as the clear junior partner. Saleh assumed office as the Head of State while Al-Beidh became Vice President.²⁶ Additionally, the political and economic systems followed the northern model. In order to preserve the General People's Congress (GPC) party and the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), the main parties of the North and South respectively, a principle of political pluralism was adopted. One major misstep that arose from this arrangement was the lack of integration in regards to their militaries. This would prove costly just a few years later. A 30-month transition period began in order to hash out many of the issues that were side-stepped during the unification process in preparation for the first election cycle in 1993.²⁷

As the transition forged ahead, an economic crisis loomed as Iraqi President Saddam Hussein prepared for the invasion of Kuwait. As Kuwait fell victim so did approximately 1

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Brian Whitaker, "Origins of Political Pluralism," in *The Birth of Modern Yemen*, Chapter 3 (e-Book: al-bab.com 2009) <http://www.al-bab.com/yemen/birthofmodernyemen/bmy3.htm>

million Yemenis who were expelled from neighboring Gulf States, where they worked in the oil fields, as a result of Yemen's support for Iraq during the First Gulf War. The remittances sent home from Yemenis working in the oil fields of the more affluent Gulf states were a major component of YAR's economic well-being prior to unification.²⁸ Remittances plummeted during this period as a result of the expulsions placing significant pressure on the economy.²⁹ The economy struggled as the 1993 parliamentary elections were held with Saleh's GPC taking 123 seats, the northern Islamic party, Islah, winning 62 seats and Al-Baidh's YSP coming in third with 56 of a total 301 seats.³⁰ This was a dismal showing for the southern contingent, dismantling the power share enjoyed during the transition period.³¹ The dominance of the northern political apparatus was all but inevitable considering the North was home to 80% of the Yemeni population prior to unification. Islah's leader Sheikh Abdullah al- Ahmar of the Hashid Tribal Confederation became the Speaker of the Parliament while Vice President Al- Beidh left Sana'a for Aden in protest of what he perceived to be a slow and uneven integration. Once Al- Beidh refused to return to take the oath of office as Vice President, the stage was set for conflict.³²

Civil War erupted in May of 1994 after Al-Beidh and his southern allies declared the formation of the Democratic Republic of Yemen. The Army in the North was supported by former mujahideen in Afghanistan and the northern Tribes. The northern victory was rapid as they pushed south towards Aden, ultimately overwhelming the southern army within just a

²⁸ Robert Hurdes and Greg Noakes, "North and South Yemen: Lead Up to the Break Up," *Washington Report*, July/August 1994, Page 48. <http://www.wrmea.com/component/content/article/156-1994-july-august/7557-north-and-south-yemen-lead-up-to-the-break-up.html>

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ ICG, *Southern Question*, 3

³¹ Ibid., 3

³² Brian Whitaker, "Coalition and Opposition," in *The Birth of Modern Yemen*, Chapter 10 (e-Book: al-bab.com 2009). <http://www.al-bab.com/yemen/birthofmodernyemen/bmy10.htm>

couple months of the onset of war.³³ The entrenched sense of marginalization by southerners persists, one of the multiple simultaneous existential threats the Republic of Yemen faces in the post-Saleh era and will be discussed later in this paper.

Saleh and the GPC

Saleh's hold on power after the Civil War of 1994 persevered in large part due to his construction of an extensive patronage network, involving tribal, political and military figures in Yemen. The network functions through payments administered by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs as well as the utilization of the education and health public sectors as mechanisms for appropriating funds through employment contracts.³⁴ In order to maintain this network, Saleh has relied upon oil revenues for the funding of the co-option, yet oil production has declined drastically over the past 10 years, causing Saleh to be unable to offer what he once could.³⁵ Yemen's dependence on oil revenues remains one of the most pressing challenges to the country's future and is a circumstance that has placed pressure on the Yemeni government to implement initiatives aimed at economic diversification. A 2010 estimate places Yemeni oil production at 258,800 barrels per day, a drop of over 40% since their peak production several years prior.³⁶ As oil accounts for approximately 75% of government revenue, the weakening of Saleh's ability to buy loyalties in the maintenance of power became apparent.³⁸

³³ ICG, *Southern Question*, 5

³⁴ Daniel Egel, "Tribal Diversity, Political Patronage, and the Yemeni Decentralization Experiment," *University of California, Berkeley*, November 19, 2009. http://www.egels.org/daniel/Research_files/Egel_Tribes.pdf

³⁵ Phillips, *Al-Qaeda, the Tribes*, 2

³⁶ CIA, "Yemen Profile," *World Factbook* <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2173rank.html?countryName=Yemen&countryCode=ym®ionCode=mde&rank=38#ym>

³⁷ Phillips, *Al-Qaeda, The Tribes*, 6

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 2

Saleh's GPC party dominated Yemeni politics since unification and acts as a mechanism for extending patronage as opposed to a political party with a platform and hierarchical structure.³⁹ Partaking in Saleh's patronage system does not necessarily mean that the individual is a member of the GPC, but the pillars of power that in some respects overlap one another include the religious elite, military elite and tribal elite. The more politically significant the actor, the more entrenched they become within the system.⁴⁰ The regime dynamics involve multiple layers or circles with the base level or inner circle involving relatively few individuals, generally either blood related or a member of Saleh's Sanhan tribe.⁴¹ The outer layers include selected elites from the main northern tribal confederations of the Hashid and Bakil as well as Zaydi Shi'a religious elites.⁴² The corruptive nature of Saleh's patronage system alienates much of the population and contributed to the calls for reform that are currently being vocalized by the protest movement.

The Uprising and the Opposition

The Yemeni uprising began on the heels of the mass protests in Tunisia and coincided with those in Egypt in January of 2011. Along with the inspiration provided by the events unfolding in Tunisia and Egypt, another politically charged debate occurred within Yemen just prior to the onset of protest, fueling the first days of opposition marches. This involved Sheikh Sultan Barakani, the head of the GPC parliamentary bloc, announcing plans to amend the constitution of Yemen in order to eliminate term limits for the office of the Presidency

³⁹ Sarah Phillips, "Yemen: Developmental Dysfunction and Division in a Crisis State," *DLP*, Research Paper 14, 3. <http://www.dlprog.org/ftp/download/Public%20Folder/1%20Research%20Papers/Yemen,%20Developmental%20Dysfunction%20and%20Division%20in%20a%20Crisis%20State.pdf>

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 4

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 4

⁴² *Ibid.*, v, Figure 1

effectively enabling Saleh to become President for life.⁴³ The timing of the proposed amendment proved unfortunate for Saleh as the Tunisian uprising began simultaneously.⁴⁴ The movement in Yemen gradually increased in intensity in the lead up to the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt in February.⁴⁵ The street protestors constituted the youth movement and consisted of various civil society groups whom are in large part separated from the political and tribal patronage system that has gripped Yemen during Saleh's rule.⁴⁶ They are young and old and in pursuit of ousting President Ali Abdullah Saleh as well as reforming the aforementioned political system. Civil society groups within Sana'a and Taizz joined together to form the Coordinating Council for the Youth Revolution of Change (CCYRC), which acted as the organizational wing of the organic movement.⁴⁷ Saleh's attempts at quelling the opposition protest included a mixture of promises and repression, detaining protestors and utilizing force against them while making proclamations of peace.

The violent reaction served to isolate Saleh from many within the ruling party whom began to defect in February. A defining moment for Saleh came on March 18th after over 50 anti-government protestors were killed by loyalist forces, compelling a string of defections, including that of Major General Ali Mohsen Saleh. Ali Mohsen commands the First Armoured Division and the northwest military zone placing him as an influential figure within the military

⁴³ ICG, "Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (II): Yemen Between Reform and Revolution," *Middle East/ North Africa Report* N*102, March 10, 2011, 1. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iran%20Gulf/Yemen/102%20Popular%20Protest%20in%20North%20Africa%20and%20the%20Middle%20East%20II%20Yemen%20between%20Reform%20and%20Revolution.pdf>

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 2

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 3

⁴⁶ David Arnold, "Understanding Yemen: Tomorrow's Youth Challenges Yesterday's Tribes," *Voanews*, Middle East, October 6, 2011. <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/middle-east/Understanding-Yemen---Tomorrows-Youth-Challenges-Yesterdays-Tribes-131222934.html>

⁴⁷ Aymerich, Olga, "A Kidnapped Revolution," *The Geopolitical Monitor*, July 21, 2011 <http://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/yemen-a-kidnapped-revolution-4420>

apparatus.⁴⁸ Ali Mohsen's defection shifted the power dynamic away from President Saleh. The shift was a bittersweet one as the protest movement transitioned to outright rebellion; the collective demands of the youth movement were co-opted by political elites in opposition to Saleh.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, Mohsen's forces accounted for approximately 50% of the regular army and provided protection to peaceful protestors in Sana'a and Taizz.⁵⁰

In addition to Ali Mohsen, the powerful Al-Ahmar brothers, leaders of the Hashid Tribal Confederation publicly supported the youth movement and took up arms against government forces. Sadeq Al-Ahmar leads the confederation and tribal forces loyal to the leader intensified fighting against Saleh's forces in Sana'a, after Saleh ordered for his arrest along with his brothers.⁵¹ The clashes culminated in an attempted assassination of Saleh, which left the beleaguered President severely burned.⁵² Saleh was airlifted to Saudi Arabia to undergo surgery for his injuries and remained there until his return to Yemen in September. Many believed his departure to be his ultimate demise, as Vice President Hadi became acting President in his absence. Although it quickly became clear that Saleh's son Ahmed, the leader of the countries now infamous Republican Guards, was truly in charge after he deliberately locked the Vice President out of the Presidential compound.⁵³ Months of political and military stalemate ensued with neither side capable of exerting absolute supremacy over the other. The GCC deal, brokered by the Saudis and other Gulf representative countries and backed by the United States remained

⁴⁸ Al Jazeera, "Top Army Commanders Defect in Yemen," *Middle East*, March 21, 2011.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/03/2011320180579476.html>

⁴⁹ Aymerich, *Kidnapped*

⁵⁰ Gregory Johnsen, "Resetting US Policy Towards Yemen," Policy Innovation Memorandum No. 8, Council on Foreign Relations Press: September 2011. <http://www.cfr.org/yemen/resetting-us-policy-toward-yemen/p26026>

⁵¹ Tom Finn, "Yemen Edges Closer to Civil War as Tribal Leader Takes Fight to Saleh," *The Guardian*, May 26, 2011. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/may/26/yemen-edges-closer-civil-war>

⁵² Al Jazeera English, "Wounded Yemeni President In Saudi Arabia," *Middle East*, June 5, 2011.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/06/201164164346765100.html>

⁵³ Tom Finn, "Yemen's Next Crises: Giving Saleh the Push May Have Been the Easy Part," *Time Magazine World*, November 29, 2011, 2 <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2100431-1,00.html>

on the table unsigned by President Saleh. The Yemeni President backtracked three times on signing the deal prior to his departure in June.⁵⁴

What exists now is a complex web of interests with the opposition JMP, which consists of the Yemeni Congregation for Reform aka Islah, the dominant force within the umbrella group and the Yemeni Socialist Party, the main political party of South Yemen prior to unification in 1990, along with Nasserites, al- Haq (the political wing affiliated with the al Houthi movement in the north) etc. acting as the public face for transition talks. The youth movement became overwhelmed by the process perhaps an inevitable consequence as successfully ousting Saleh, a man that maintained a grip on power for decades, is a formidable task that requires the support of elites from the existing power structure. The myriad interests and groups involved had amplified that lack of cohesion amongst the opposition. The fractured opposition illustrated their lack of unity in July when two transitional councils were formed, one by members of the youth movement and the other by the JMP.⁵⁵

From the outset, the JMP's loose association of different political parties with often times competing interests could be seen by their overall reluctance to demand Saleh's removal. They assisted in organizing rallies against Saleh's proposed term limit amendment, yet were inconsistent depending on the individual and the party when it came to supporting the youth movement's call for Saleh's removal.⁵⁶ In the beginning of the movement, some within the JMP called for Saleh's departure though the official party line left the possibility open for dialogue

⁵⁴ Ibid., 2

⁵⁵ Reuters, "Yemen Protestors Set up Transitional Council," *World*, July 16, 2011.
<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/07/16/us-yemen-idUSTRE76F0ZP20110716>

⁵⁶ ICG, *Popular Protest*, 3

about procedural reform.⁵⁷ They claimed that their concern rested with how the country is run and not who is running it, yet their tune changed as Saleh utilized violent tactics to suppress the uprising.⁵⁸

After the June assassination attempt, Saleh refused to sign the GCC deal if his rivals, Ali Mohsen and the Al-Ahmars were to be allowed to hold positions of power after the Presidents removal.⁵⁹ This acted as a significant roadblock to transition. These were the real power brokers in the opposition movement and despite Saleh's own Sanhan tribe being a part of the Hashid Tribal Confederation, an acrimonious rivalry between the Saleh's and the Al-Ahmars materialized within the context of this uprising.⁶⁰ The political competition between Ahmed Ali-Abdullah Saleh and Ali Mohsen persists with each in charge of thousands of trained military personnel. The competition for presidential succession is a reality that does not simply vanish with Saleh's tenure. The Al-Ahmar's of the Hashid Tribe will certainly pursue power in one form or another despite being left on the outside of the power transfer deal.⁶¹

The GCC deal was a beneficial one for Saleh with a limited shelf life. The Yemeni President of 33 years agreed to sign the GCC power transfer deal on November 23rd, allowing for the myriad issues facing Yemen's future to finally become the focal point.⁶² On December 17, Interim President Hadi announced plans to de-militarize Sana'a, which Ali Mohsen has publicly supported and the troop drawdown has thus far been respected by both Yemeni security forces as

⁵⁷ Ibid., 3

⁵⁸ Ibid., 2

⁵⁹ AFP "Saleh Says he won't step down unless rivals quit," *France 24*, September 30, 2011.

<http://www.france24.com/en/20110930-president-saleh-unrest-coup-mansur-hadi-yemen-al-ahmar>

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Tom Finn, "Yemen President Quits After Deal in Saudi Arabia," *The Guardian*, November 23, 2011.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/23/yemen-president-quits>

⁶² BBC, "Yemen Opposition Leader Mohammed Basindwa Named Prime Minister," *News Middle East*, November 27, 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-15912086>

well as those under Mohsen's command.⁶³ Many in the youth protest movement are livid over the immunity clause of the agreement. After bearing the brunt of regime loyalist violence over the past 10 months, the prospect of Saleh avoiding prosecution is unfathomable.⁶⁴ Although the larger concern for the youth movement is that their calls for democratic reforms and political inclusiveness are in jeopardy of becoming afterthoughts.

In my view, the tipping point for Saleh to accept the transfer deal came with the attention brought by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2014 in October, appointing special envoy Jamal Bin Omar to Yemen charged with providing a 30 day report on progress made towards instituting the GCC deal.⁶⁵ This coupled with threats of an asset freeze, which would serve to weaken Saleh's ability to maintain loyalties in the tribal and military communities, left the President with only one solid option.⁶⁶ Why the resolution took as long as it did to materialize may be due to the Security Council's preoccupation with Libya and Syria.

Saleh signed and received immunity along with a number of other key figures within the GPC including Saleh's kin.⁶⁷ His family members retain their posts within the security apparatus and Saleh is neither exiled from the country nor explicitly banned from future political participation. Saleh has transferred power but the political institutions that the former President

⁶³ *Stratfor*, "Yemen: Defected General Announces Support of GCC Deal," December 18, 2011.

<http://www.stratfor.com/sitrep/20111218-yemen-defected-general-announces-support-gcc-deal>

⁶⁴ Finn, *President Quits*.

⁶⁵ United Nations, "Security Council Condemns Human Rights Violations by Yemeni Authorities, Abuses by 'Other Actors', After Months of Political Strife," *Resolution 2014*, October 21, 2011

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2011/sc10418.doc.htm>

⁶⁶ Jeb Boone, "Time to Freeze Saleh's Assets," *Foreign Policy*, November 10, 2011.

http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/10/time_to_freeze_saleh_s_assets

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

built, remain intact, creating a window for regime survival.⁶⁸ Vice President Abd al-Rab Mansur al-Hadi assumed power and named Mohammed Basindwa as Prime Minister tasked with forming a unity government until elections are held on February 21, 2012.⁶⁹ The unity government consists of 35 individuals with a near equal split between members of the GPC and the JMP.⁷⁰

As illustrated, the opposition movement is a multi-layered collective that may now be classified within distinct categories of varying levels of access to the political transition process. The youth movement, led by the CCYRC and figures such as Nobel Peace Prize winner Tawwakul Karman, has been marginalized due to their lack of elite level political relevance. As a collection of individuals protesting in the streets, their voices were formidable but on the micro level, they have been co-opted by the Joint Meeting Parties.⁷¹ They were the engine that drove the uprising but at the elite level in which the transition process is currently playing out, their presence is more symbolic than substantive. They must continue to project their collective voice in order to compel true reform. Factions within the youth movement have formed the Arab Spring Party in preparation for participating in the political process.⁷² This is an ambitious and significant step for changing the political culture in Yemen, though it remains to be seen the amount of access those involved will gain.

For now, it will be interesting to see which individuals Prime Minister Basindwa includes in the interim Unity government in the coming days and how they deal with the military

⁶⁸ David Blair, "Yemen: Violence Flares as President Saleh's Removal Fails to Halt Bloodshed," *The Telegraph*, November 24, 2011. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/yemen/8913284/Yemen-violence-flares-as-President-Salehs-removal-fails-to-halt-bloodshed.html>

⁶⁹ BBC, *Mohammed Basindwa*.

⁷⁰ Associated Press, "Yemen Swears in National Unity Government of Opposition Figures and Loyalists," *Washington Post World*, December 10. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/al-qaida-linked-fighters-attack-yemen-army-barracks-2-soldiers-and-11-militants-killed/2011/12/10/gIQAe2c4jO_story.html

⁷¹ Aymerich, *Kidnapped*.

⁷² Fahkri Al-Arashi, "Yemen Youth Form Arab Spring Party," *National Yemen, Health and Community*, <http://nationalyemen.com/2011/12/04/yemeni-youth-form-arab-spring-party/>

apparatus. The cleavages within the security forces create a major obstacle towards a peaceful transition from here on out. And since the opposition and international community did not demand the removal of Saleh's kin from military posts, they will need to be negotiated with in order to be brought into the fold. For all intents and purposes, Saleh continues to maintain relevance and is still capable of potentially destabilizing the transition.

Important Topics for Yemen's Future

The Southern Question

Yemen's north-south division continues to pose a significant threat to the stability and social and political cohesion of the ailing country. In 2007, a rights based movement known as Al-Hiraak al-Janoubi emerged as an umbrella group for various southern entities upset with the status quo and the perception of political and economic marginalization at the hands of Saleh and the Northern tribes.⁷³ Although this movement began as simply working towards equality under the law and improving the North-South dynamic, Saleh responded with acts of repression at times through force while shutting down multiple southern news outlets in order to stifle information flows.⁷⁴ When concessions were offered by Saleh, they were perceived as half-measures and therefore inadequate. The movement radicalized as a result and in the past couple years began demanding secession.⁷⁵

The Southern Movement has evolved from a rights-based movement to one demanding either secession or significantly increased regional autonomy, with the latter, in a general sense,

⁷³ ICG, *Southern Question*, 6.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 8

⁷⁵ Katherine Zimmerman, "Yemen's Southern Challenge: Background of the Rising Threat of Secessionism," *Critical Threats*, November 5, 2009. <http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/yemens-southern-challenge-background-rising-threat-secessionism>

mirroring the demands of the Al-Houthi Zaydi Shiite movement in the North.⁷⁶ There is a divide within the Southern Movement regarding these two options as well as within the less influential yet still present YSP party. On an elite level, former southern exiled leaders Ali Nasser Muhammed and Haydar al-Attas support a federal option that would aim to decentralize government with the North and South as the two components, supported by a bicameral legislature with equal representation in the upper chamber and finally an option for a referendum vote on secession after a set period of years.⁷⁷ Former Vice President Al-Beidh advocates secession outright and maintains a level of animosity towards the other figures for their willingness to dialogue with the JMP about potential of a solution that preserves unity. This point of contention stems from the presence of Islah, the dominant entity within the JMP and their history of cooperation with Saleh as well as the role of the Northern tribal entities participation against the PDRY and the south during the 1994 civil war.⁷⁸

The southern question demands immediate attention during the transition period. On December 7th, Southern Movement leader Hassan Baoum and his son Fawaz Baoum were released from prison in Sanaa after several months of incarceration.⁷⁹ This is a positive signal that there is significant interest in addressing the grievances and the fact the Al-Beidh hails from the south creates a feeling of optimism. This is the most politically legitimate and immediately solvable issue that Yemen faces right now. Although, with the interim National Unity Government consisting of almost equal numbers of loyalists from the GPC and opposition members of the JMP, the possibility of the southern question becoming a secondary issue remains as many in these two groups may be incapable of maintaining an honest discussion

⁷⁶ ICG, *Southern Secession*, 8

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 13

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 14

⁷⁹ Zimmerman, *Southern Challenge*.

regarding the prospect of secession.⁸⁰ While actions of good faith such as the release of the Baoums are important, there are very difficult challenges ahead that demand structural and institutional reform. These reforms will most likely demand a greater role for local governance structures, overall economic autonomy, greater access to civil service and military positions for Southerners, legislative reform etc. With Yemen in such a fragile state, the North-South divide could prove to be unsustainable, therefore federalism, either multi-state or two state, is an option that should be explored through an open dialogue with Hiraak and Southern political leaders.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the US Response

The activities of AQAP over the previous year have been significant, with skirmishes against Yemeni security forces in the South and Al-Houthi rebels in the North adding a layer of instability to the fragile country. AQAP territorial gains in the south, particularly in Abyan, appear to be a strategic maneuver positioning the group to gain access to the Arabian Sea. In addition, one analyst posits that their strategy aims to connect their strongholds in the Shabwah, Al-Jawf, and Marib Governorates with Abyan and into Lahij in order to create a route that provides greater access into Saudi Arabia in the North and Aden in the south.⁸² In regards to the uprising, Al-Qaeda most influential role was minimizing the US response to the protest movement in Yemen.

This response over the past year resembled a country without a coherent policy. Saleh maintained status as a partner in the War on Terror, allowing American drones to target militants on their soil over the past 10 years, including the September killing of Al-Qaeda Cleric Anwar

⁸⁰ Associated Press, *National Unity*.

⁸¹ ICG, *Southern Question*, 5

⁸² Frederick W. Kagan, "Al-Qaeda's Yemen Strategy," *AEI Critical Threats*, June 21, 2011.

<http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/frederick-kagan-qaeda-yemen-strategy-june-21-2011>

al- Awlaki.⁸³ As a result of their acquiescence, Saleh expected US assistance in combating the unrest even criticizing their counter-terror allies of playing politics.⁸⁴ The US strategy in Yemen gradually shifted as the civil unrest in Yemen increased and Saleh employed repressive measures. This coupled with the larger politicized context surrounding the Arab Spring appeared to compel the US to employ a distant approach, favoring drone strikes and cruise missiles and gradually bringing home their operatives.⁸⁵ Despite this tacit acknowledgement of Saleh's depleting legitimacy, the US remained largely absent from the process over the past year isolating their counter-terror operations in the country from their public stance on the political situation. President Barack Obama called for Saleh to step aside under the auspices of the GCC deal, angering the Yemeni President, yet never applied maximum level pressure, namely freezing the payments from the 75 million dollars earmarked last year for counter-terrorism support to the government.⁸⁶

Saudi Arabia

Amy Grinsfelder

Is Saudi Arabia prime for the Arab Awakening?

With much of the Arab world undergoing a complete political transformation, or revolution, many scholars have questioned what effect these events and “awakenings” will have

⁸³ Johnsen, *Resetting*.

⁸⁴ Karen Deyoung and Sudarsan Raghavan, “Despite Death of Awlaki, U.S. Yemeni Relations Strained,” *Washington Post*, World, October 5, 2011, 2. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/despite-death-of-awlaki-us-yemen-relations-strained/2011/10/05/gIQAevelOL_story_1.html

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 2

⁸⁶ Johnsen, *Resetting*.

on other regimes in the Arab world. While most of the smaller gulf monarchies have been relatively untouched by the “Arab Awakening,” Saudi Arabia is a bit of a different case. Blessed with what seems like unending wealth due to vast oil reserves, a close relationship with the United States and a royal monarchy in power for almost 100 years, on the surface Saudi Arabia appears to be stable and relatively unconcerned with the events unfolding around them. Upon closer inspection however, there are cracks in this façade. Saudi Arabia has several potential threats looming over their head, both within the kingdom and beyond. Abused and repressed minorities, a potential crisis of succession in the royal family and pressure from Iran are all very really issues that may serve as stressors to destabilize the Saudi regime.

Background

Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932, and is the birthplace of Islam, as well as home to the two most important Islamic shrines in Mecca and Medina.⁸⁷ The government is a traditional monarchy, headed by King Abdullah.⁸⁸ The constitution is based on the holy text of the Qur’an and the country is governed by Shar’ia law and is very culturally conservative, although some secular codes have been introduced recently.⁸⁹ The government recognizes no official political parties, while the monarch (King Abdullah) is both chief of state and head of government.⁹⁰ He does maintain Council of Ministers, which is largely comprised of members of the royal

⁸⁷ CIA, “Saudi Arabia Profile,” *World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sa.html>

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

family.⁹¹ Recently, municipal elections have been held, but the monarchy continues to exercise primary control over the government and economy.⁹²

Saudi Arabia has a population of about 28 million people and the capital city is Riyadh.⁹³ Saudi Arabia is a very wealthy country, ranking in the top 25 of highest GDP's worldwide.⁹⁴ The Saudi economy is largely oil based, with the petroleum sector accounting for roughly 80% of budget revenues, 45% of GDP, and 90% of export earning.⁹⁵ Additionally, Saudi Arabia is the second largest exporter of petroleum worldwide, and is home to the largest proven oil reserves (about 20% of the world's oil).⁹⁶ Unsurprisingly, Saudi Arabia is the leading member of OPEC, and has vested interests in maintaining stable and profitable relationships in the region. More than 95% of all Saudi oil is produced on behalf of the Saudi government by ARAMCO, the world's largest fully integrated oil company.⁹⁷ Since its ascension into the WTO in 2005, King Abdullah has been seeking to diversify their economy into the power generation, telecommunications, natural gas exploration and petrochemical sectors.⁹⁸

Aside from the lack of diversity within the economy, unemployment is a huge problem for Saudi Arabia. Currently, the unemployment rate is around 10.8% (this figure only reflects rate for Saudi men).⁹⁹ There are about 6 million foreign workers employed in S.A, and about 80% of the work force is currently estimated to be non-national.¹⁰⁰

⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ *ibid.*

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

The United States is Saudi Arabia's leading trading partner.¹⁰¹ Aside from shared economic interests, S.A and the United States also share common concerns regarding regional security of the Middle East, sustainable development, and Counterterrorism efforts.¹⁰²

Despite this close relationship, the United States does have significant concern with Saudi Arabia's ongoing human rights abuses. Most notably, the abuse of prisoners, incommunicado detention, prohibition or severe restrictions on freedom of speech, press, peaceful assembly and association, and religion, denial of the right of citizens to change their government, systematic discrimination against women, ethnic and religious minorities and suppression of workers rights.¹⁰³

Saudi Arabia ranks 55 out of 169 countries profiled with the Human Development Index; faring very well comparatively.¹⁰⁴ Saudi Arabia ranks both higher than its regional neighbors AND higher than the world average as well. What I found interesting is although Saudi Arabia ranks reasonably well worldwide, and one might assume given these facts and statistics that Saudi Arabia is more developed, and therefore better off than most of the rest of the world (or at least those countries in the sample), this is not the case. I would argue that because the HDI neglects to address other non-economic indicators of development such as ANY measure of political, religious or civil freedom or the inequality between the sexes and minorities (both cultural and racial), this HDI rank does not accurately reflect development within Saudi Arabian society. Additionally, Saudi Arabia is known to have a long history of human rights abuses and is notorious intolerant of minorities within their kingdom, which I will discuss in a later section.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ UNDP, "Saudi Arabia Country Profile: Human Development Indicators", <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/SAU.html>

History

In the interest of both time and space I have decided against providing a detailed section on the history of Saudi Arabia. Both Yergin and Gause provided us with detailed accounts of the history of Saudi Arabia in our readings throughout the semester. For a comprehensive timeline of Saudi Arabia's history, please see the blog post entitled, "Gulf Chronological Timeline," posted on October 9, 2011.

Current Situation

Saudi Arabia is a prime target for the Arab Spring. It is a closed society with unequal wealth distribution, a large and diverse group of repressed minorities living within manufactured boundaries, a society ripe with Islamist (extremist) sympathies and warring Sunni vs. Shia factions. Additionally, the royal family is facing a crisis of leadership in regards to line of succession and future of the royal line. The people of Saudi Arabia want a more representative government and political reform and several disgruntled (not yet quite oppositional) groups have emerged, while the Al Saud family struggles to maintain their legitimacy and rule. Based on my research I have identified three threats that pose greatest risk to the Al Saud regime: Women, the Youth, and the Shia minority and Iran. In my opinion, these groups and Iran are the most likely to destabilize the royal family and incite a Saudi Arabian "Arab Awakening".

Principle Threat: Women

As I mentioned before, Saudi Arabia is ruled by Shar'ia law and society is governed by the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam, creating a very conservative and religious civil society. In general, women do not experience the same rights or freedoms that men do in Saudi society. According to Amnesty International's 2011 report on Saudi Arabia, "Women continued to face

discrimination in law and in practice and to be subjected to domestic and other violence. The law does not give women equal status with men, and rules on male guardianship subordinate women to men in relation to marriage, divorce, child custody and freedom of movement. This leaves women vulnerable to violence within the home, which may be committed by men with impunity.’¹⁰⁵

In September 2011, King Abdullah granted women the right to vote, marking the first time in Saudi history that women would be allowed to participate in the political system.¹⁰⁶ Along with allowing women to cast ballots in the 2015 elections, King Abdullah also pledged to appoint women to his advisory council stating, ‘Muslim women in our Islamic history have demonstrated positions that expressed correct opinions and advice.’¹⁰⁷ King Abdullah has been seen as a reformer by much of the world, and allowing women the right to vote is a very important step in realizing more social and political freedoms within the Saudi kingdom. However, there are still many impediments that women in Saudi Arabia face on a day to day basis that make them particularly susceptible to the “Arab awakening” movement.

Despite now being able to cast ballots in the 2015 elections, many women in Saudi Arabia feel this falls short of what they are really asking.¹⁰⁸ While it is not technically illegal for women to drive in Saudi Arabia, there is a kingdom wide ban on women driving.¹⁰⁹ Anna North, a writer from *Jezebel*, a popular Feminist blog based out of New York City writes, “the right to vote doesn't mean all that much in a country where the most important political positions are still

¹⁰⁵ Amnesty International, “Saudi Arabia,” *Annual Report 2011*, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/saudi-arabia/report-2011#ai-reports>

¹⁰⁶ NPR, “Saudi King Gives Women Right to Vote,” 25 September 2011, <http://www.npr.org/2011/09/25/140784104/saudi-king-gives-women-right-to-vote>

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ North, “As Saudi Voting Ban is Lifted, Driving Ban gets Worse,” *Jezebel*, 27 September, 2011, <http://jezebel.com/5844238/as-saudi-voting-ban-is-lifted-driving-ban-gets-worse>

unelected. And since women still need permission from a male relative to vote, the new freedom may not have all that much impact on their lives. The ability to drive unaccompanied (which King Abdullah has also promised but never delivered), meanwhile, would make a big practical difference for many women. The King appears to have offered a largely symbolic freedom instead of one that would make a big day-to-day change in women's lives. It's not clear whether this is a calculated attempt to distract people from what really matters, but it may have that effect, especially internationally.”¹¹⁰

Feeling the pressure of lifting the driving ban on women, the religious high council of Saudi Arabia, the Majlis al-Ifa al-Aala, issued a very controversial report regarding the potential consequences should women be allowed to drive in early December. Essentially the report stated that allowing women to drive would ‘provoke a surge in prostitution, pornography, homosexuality and divorce’, and that within ten years of lifting the ban there would be ‘no more virgins’ within the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.¹¹¹ Even with the high clerics issuing inflammatory statements such as this, women are still protesting the ban and driving anyway, despite being subject to public lashings, jail time and even ostracism from society.¹¹² By committing even small acts of subversion (like driving in protest of the ban) women in Saudi Arabia are demonstrating that they are discontent with the status quo and desire more freedom in their daily lives. Because of this, women are of particular interest in a potential “Arab Awakening” within Saudi Arabia. It will be interesting to watch what freedoms (if any) the new Crown Prince implements after he ascends the throne and if women will continue to protest (albeit quietly) in the name of more freedoms.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹¹ Ghanem, “No more virginity in Saudi if Women drive says Council,” *bikyamasr*, 2 December 2011, <http://bikyamasr.com/50109/no-more-virginity-in-saudi-if-women-drive-says-council/>

¹¹² *ibid.*

Principle Threat: The Youth vs. Crown Prince Nayef

Similar to much of the Arab World, Saudi Arabia has a very young population with the median age at about 25 years old.¹¹³ Much like the women of Saudi Arabia, the youth have been increasingly outspoken about their desire for political reform and social change. As of right now, they have been met with financial reforms, but little in the way any real social or political liberalization.

With unemployment estimates as high as 25%, much of Saudi Arabia's youth feels disillusioned, and has little hope for the future.¹¹⁴ Additionally, with King Abdullah 87 years old and ailing, and Crown Prince Nayef next in line to take the throne, many are unsure of the liberal reforms implemented by King Abdullah will stick with Crown Prince Nayef being much more conservative.¹¹⁵

As recent as early December, Saudi Arabia and the United States have been in negotiations to invest \$385 billion dollars in Saudi's future.¹¹⁶ The Forum in Atlanta, discussed how the \$385 billion dollars would be spent, including contributing to education, oil and gas, infrastructure, petrochemicals, transportation, water and electricity, and information technology reforms and improvements within Saudi Arabia.¹¹⁷ Saudi Arabia has recently been making changes to expand and diversify their economy, and move away from their dependence on oil.

¹¹³ CIA, "Saudi Arabia Profile," *World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sa.html>

¹¹⁴ Danin, "Is Saudi Arabia Next?", *The Atlantic*, 4 December 2011, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/12/is-saudi-arabia-next/249419/>

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Ghafour, "\$386bn Projects to be discussed as Saudi-US Forum," *Arab News*, 4 December 2011, <http://arabnews.com/economy/article543068.ece>

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

This investment demonstrates the continued strength of US/Saudi relations and also demonstrates to the world that Saudi Arabia is a strategic “stable and reliable partner” for the United States.¹¹⁸ Still with unemployment high and a young population observing the events unfolding in the Arab world around them, it remains to be seen if these reforms will seek to improve the outlook on the future for the young members of Saudi society.

Saudi Arabia’s oil wealth has allowed for crackdowns to be implemented throughout the kingdom. As per an article in the Atlantic, “fortunately for the kingdom, the nine million barrels of oil Saudi produces each day provide tremendous revenue for it to dole out these kinds of subsidies. Moreover, this income, combined with Saudi’s huge cash reserves, estimated at \$400 billion, allows the ruling family to maintain comprehensive security and intelligence apparatuses, the ability to wield huge influence over both domestic and international media, and the general ability to quell unrest by throwing money at problems.”¹¹⁹ With a vast security and intelligence systems overseeing activity throughout the kingdom, it has become increasingly difficult for dissent to be vocalized. Crown Prince Nayef, served as the Minister of the Interior since 1975 and was previously Minister of Defense (1962-1975) and is noted as being much more conservative than King Abdullah, and therefore much more likely to crush any dissent quickly and likely with the use of force.¹²⁰ At the age of 78, Crown Prince Nayef is significantly older than the majority of the population of his state.¹²¹ Many scholars have speculated that because of his late age and coupled with his conservative views and close ties to the Wahhabi Clerical establishment Crown Prince Nayef is increasingly out of touch with the people he will soon

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*

¹²⁰ Riedel, “What to expect from the New Saudi Crown Prince,” *The Brookings Institute*, 1 November 2011, http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2011/1101_saudi_arabia_riedel.aspx

¹²¹ Kinninmont, “Keeping it the Family”, *The Middle East Channel*, 3 November 2011, http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/03/keeping_it_in_the_family_for_saudi_succession

govern.¹²² Additionally, Crown Prince Nayef has thought to be involved directly in the interventions in Bahrain (which I will discuss in the next section) the situation in Yemen, and as Interior Minister, maintains a vast power base including: internal security, paramilitary and intelligence forces (public security forces), civil defense, border guards, special security forces and the religious police; all making him an extremely connected and well informed, and in short, a very powerful man.¹²³

While King Abdullah's response to any unrest within the kingdom has been to throw money at the problem, including: extensive social welfare reform packages and spending upwards of 36 to 90 billion dollars on pay raises, housing support, unemployment benefits, and promised subsidies in an already overwhelmingly welfare state, many suspect that Crown Prince Nayef will take a different approach.¹²⁴ Amnesty International already feels that this fear is being realized as a draft version of a new anti terrorism law was leaked recently. The new law would basically allow the Saudi government to detain security suspects indefinitely and without trail.¹²⁵ Amnesty International accuses the law as way for the royal family and the security forces to silence dissent, stating that the law includes a deliberately vague definition of terrorism ranging from "destabilizing to society" to "harming the reputation of the state."¹²⁶

Because Saudi Arabia is governed by Shar'ia law, there is no formal written criminal code. This allows for security forces a lot of leeway in terms of interpreting the law. Saudi

¹²² *ibid.*

¹²³ *ibid.*

¹²⁴ Riedel, "Brezhnev in the Hejaz," *The National Interest*, 24 August 2011, <http://nationalinterest.org/article/brezhnev-the-hejaz-5733>

¹²⁵ Amnesty International, "Saudi Arabia: Protesters and Reformist targeted in the name of Security," 1 December 2011, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/saudi-arabia-protesters-and-reformists-targeted-name-security-2011-12-01>

¹²⁶ *ibid.*

Arabia has a long history of human rights abuses and has been subject to much criticism for this in the international community. In the wake of the recent unrest unfolding in the area, the Interior Minister was quoted as to say he would take “all necessary measures” against those seeking to “disrupt order”.¹²⁷

Principle Threat: The Shia Minority and Iran

There is much debate over whether Saudi Arabia should be viewed as the central counter-revolutionary force in the current Arab Awakening, or rather, its behavior toward fledgling regimes in the region is an attempt to maintain the delicate balance of power in the region via Saudi vs. Iranian dominance.

The sectarian factor dividing Saudi and Iran is becoming more and more central to interstate relations. With Saudi Arabia and Iran vying for power and dominance in the region, the sectarian differences between the two states have been highlighted and proved to be a significant issue in Saudi Arabia, especially in light of the Arab awakening.¹²⁸ There have been violent clashes in Qatif (an oil rich region in S.A) between Saudi forces and Shiites, which was blamed on Iran directly, and responded with “an iron fist” (as any dissent across country will be according to the leadership in Riyadh).¹²⁹ In early December, violence erupted again in Qatif, echoing the “Day of Rage” in March 2011. Much like before, the Shia minority was protesting in support of their Bahraini brothers and Saudi’s security intervention to put down the Shia rebellion in Bahrain, as well as against the mistreatment they experience as second-class citizens

¹²⁷ *ibid.*

¹²⁸ Gause, “Is Saudi Arabia Really Counter-Revolutionary?” *The Middle East Channel*, 9 August 2011, http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/08/09/is_saudi_arabia_really_counter_revolutionary

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

of Saudi Arabia.¹³⁰ With four killed and several injured, these protest mark the first time Saudi Arabia has opened gunfire on peacefully demonstrators, indicating a significant shift from financial and diplomatic dealings with dissent to one of deploying actual force.¹³¹ The Royal family blamed an unnamed “foreign influence” (Iran) for inciting the riots and attempted to divert as much blame as possible on to Iran.¹³²

In addition to direct violence along sectarian lines, the potential rise in extremist activity in the region is also of concern. Gause notes that these sectarian tensions provide fertile ground for selling extremist ideology abroad, and recruiting new members.¹³³ The Salafi Jihadist movement, Al Qaeda, is thought to be “under control” within the Arabian Peninsula, but for how long? It seems logical that the promotion of a common Arab identity would serve to stabilize and unify the region, but at this point, with Iran and Saudi vying for dominance in the Middle East, it seems highly unlikely that the successful promotion of such is unlikely.¹³⁴

What does seem more likely is the possibility of a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Margaret Coker and Farnaz Fassihi wrote an article for the WSJ back in mid-October indicating the US withdrawal from Iraq may provide the perfect opportunity for violent

¹³⁰ Al Jazeera, “Saudi Police on High Alert,” 26 November 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/11/2011112465955365750.html>

¹³¹ *ibid.*

¹³² Chaymatelli, “Saudi Arabia Says Four Killed in Unrest in Oil-Rich East,” Bloomberg News, 24 November 2011, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-11-24/saudi-arabia-says-four-killed-in-unrest-in-oil-rich-east-1-.html>

¹³³ Gause, “Is Saudi Arabia Really Counter-Revolutionary?” *The Middle East Channel*, 9 August 2011, http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/08/09/is_saudi_arabia_really_counter_revolutionary

¹³⁴ “Time for Saudi Arabia to Embrace its Shias,” *Dawn.com*, 26 November 2011, <http://www.dawn.com/2011/11/26/time-for-saudi-arabia-to-embrace-its-shias.html>

conflict.¹³⁵ With US withdrawal, the regional equilibrium will essentially be upended and Iraq is a border state to both Saudi Arabia and Iran, with sectarian issues of its own.¹³⁶

With Iran seeking to play out its own “Grand Bargaining Strategy” with the United States (unsuccessfully, it would appear); Saudi Arabia is weary of ANY Iranian influence and views the spread of such as a direct threat to Saudi stability. A stable Middle East is obviously best for American interests, but I would argue that the US would fully support (or at least not openly reject or admonish) Saudi Arabia should any conflict between the two states arise.

Because the future of the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia remains to be seen, I think that the actions of Crown Prince Nayef toward any violence at home, and within the region will be a good indication of how the relationship between Iran and Saudi will play out. In terms of the Arab Awakening and the Saudi role, I think that it is within the best interest of the royal family to act as a counter-revolutionary force (to maintain their monarchy they will have to oppress any and all dissent) and in doing so, this will serve to contain Iranian influence and maintain the current balance of power within the region. As of right now, this strategy has been working, the question is for how much longer will it continue to do so?

Conclusions and Implications

Although Saudi Arabia has been thus far able to contain and silence most of the unrest within the borders of its Kingdom, it is clear that dissent is widespread and the future of the kingdom remains to be seen. Saudi Arabia is extremely wealthy and therefore better able to handle and absorb discontent among its people by providing them with generous welfare

¹³⁵ Cocker and Fassihi, “Iran, Saudi Arabia Tensions Spurs Fear of a Proxy War,” the *Wall Street Journal*, 17 October 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203658804576635150261606730.html>

¹³⁶ *ibid.*

subsidies and a relatively comfortable standard of living. While this has been sufficient for quite some time now, it is unclear how long this will continue to pacify the people. With unrest growing among marginalized groups and the youth of society, demands for liberalization and more freedom are beginning to be harder to ignore. With the naming of conservative Crown Prince Nayef, I believe that unrest will continue to spread and be more vocalized with the government responding in a strict and perhaps even violent manner. The looming threat of Iran also puts Saudi Arabia in a precarious position. Insistent on containing Iranian influence (both to remain the regional hegemon and continue on in the good graces of the United States) will become increasingly difficult should Saudi continue to neglect their Shia minority. There is also the potential for violence between the two states as Saudi Arabia has intervened in Bahrain and potentially a competition for hegemony in Iraq with the US troops withdrawal recently complete.

Bahrain

Therese Postel

Introduction to Bahrain

In February of 2011, protests that had swept across Egypt and Tunisia made their way to Bahrain.¹³⁷ Civil unrest is not an unfamiliar event in Bahrain, but no one could predict the way the regime and the rest of the world would react regarding the events that took place.

Protests in Manama, the capital city of Bahrain, were large, organized sit-ins that solely called for constitutional reform and an entirely democratically elected Parliament.¹³⁸ However,

¹³⁷ Chulov, Martin. "Bahrain's Quiet Anger Turns to Rage." *The Guardian*. 17 Feb. 2011. Web.

as the Gulf Cooperation Council and the rest of the oil-consuming world would agree, these protests pose a large threat to the stability of the region. Protests in Manama were only an hour's drive away from the oil fields of eastern Saudi Arabia. The King Fahd Causeway, an astounding technological achievement, has recently connected these lands. This bridge does not only connect the countries physically, but has the potential to link disenfranchised groups inside both countries. On each side of the bridge lays Shia opposition groups but the Gulf is dominated by Sunni influence. In a part of the world where a sectarian split between Iranian backed Shia Muslims and Saudi backed Sunni Muslims seems sharper with each passing day, these protests in Manama had to be quelled as soon as possible.

A vicious cycle of violence, negotiations, protests, and further violence has taken root. I will document the history, key factors, and geostrategic concerns that have shaped these protests up to this point. The protests in Bahrain have the widest and most troubling implications for the region and the world at large.

History and Key Facts of Bahrain: 1913 – 2010

Bahrain holds an interesting history, as it has been a strategic location for centuries between many civilizations, both ancient and present. Bahrain held a strategic location between Mesopotamia and the Indus River Valley for trade and commerce.¹³⁹ In Sumerian lore, Bahrain was a land in which the “wise and brave” were taken to enjoy eternal life.¹⁴⁰ Bahrain, meaning “two seas” in Arabic, is strategically located on major shipping and trade routes. Bahrain was

¹³⁸ "Opposition Set to Present Demands to Bahraini Government." *Dawn.com*. 20 Feb. 2011. Web.

¹³⁹ "Background Note: Bahrain." *U.S. Department of State*. 8 July 2011. Web.

¹⁴⁰ "Bahrain Country Profile." *BBC News*. 22 Nov. 2011. Web.

part of the Persian Empire until 1783 when members of the current ruling Al-Khalifah family expelled the Persians from their shores.¹⁴¹ This was the beginning of tense Persian-Arab relations in the region. Bahrain was considered the location of the finest pearls in the world and became a pearling colony long before the discovery of oil.¹⁴²

Bahrain is an archipelago that lies in the Persian Gulf with Iran, Iraq, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia surrounding it. Bahrain clearly occupies a place in one of the most strategic locations of the world. For this reason, Bahrain has often struggled with foreign influence on its land. After expelling the Persians from their shores, Bahrain signed a treaty with Great Britain in 1861 wherein it became a British protectorate.¹⁴³ Iran claimed Bahrain as part of its territory until 1970 when it reneged these claims at the United Nations.¹⁴⁴ There is still a strong fear of Iran within the Bahraini regime, which has become apparent throughout the current protests.

The Ottoman influence grew in the Gulf region before WWI and Bahrain became a gambling piece in this game. In 1913, before the start of WWI, the British and the Ottoman Empire signed a treaty in which Bahrain remained a British protectorate, although the treaty stated that Bahrain was an independent country.¹⁴⁵ Throughout this time, and up until the current day, the Al-Khalifa family has ruled the country.

Bahrain discovered oil inside its territory in 1931. The Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO), an affiliate of Standard Oil Company of California (SOCAL), discovered this oil.¹⁴⁶ The oil was found at Jabal al-Dukhan and Bahrain was one of the first countries in the Gulf to

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² "Bahrain Seeks to Preserve Ancient Pearling Traditions." *CNN World*. 11 Mar. 2010. Web.

¹⁴³ "Bahrain Country Profile." *BBC News*. 22 Nov. 2011. Web.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ "Bahrain Country Profile." *BBC News*. 22 Nov. 2011. Web.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

discover oil and simultaneously build a refinery.¹⁴⁷ A refinery was a necessary and important step for the future, as Bahrain did not have the massive oil reserves that exist in its neighboring countries.¹⁴⁸ Bahrain was forced to have a much more diversified economy, becoming a center for oil refining and international banking, because of its smaller oil reserves.¹⁴⁹ Bahrain's status as an international banking giant is a major concern for the regime and the world economy at large during the continuing protests in the country.¹⁵⁰

In 1971, Bahrain formally declared its independence from the British and Sheikh Isa al-Khalifa became the first Emir of Bahrain.¹⁵¹ It did not take long for the United States to initiate a relationship with the tiny Gulf nation. In the same year, the United States signed a treaty with Bahrain that allowed for the renting of land to U.S. military facilities in the Persian Gulf.¹⁵² In the midst of the Cold War, and up to the present day, this has been of the utmost geostrategic concern to the United States and its Gulf allies.

In 1981, Bahrain formally joined the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).¹⁵³ Bahrain was the 6th nation to join this council and only Jordan and Morocco have been invited since.¹⁵⁴ In the same year, Bahrain arrested 73 members of an Iranian-backed group that sought to overthrow the Sunni emirate.¹⁵⁵¹⁵⁶ As was noted earlier, there is a long and contentious history of Shia and Sunni sectarian divides within Bahrain that has set the backdrop for the current protests.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ "Bahrain." *CIA World Factbook*. Central Intelligence Agency, 29 Nov. 2011. Web.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Weisenthal, Joe. "The Simple Reason A Bahraini Revolution Could Trigger A Brand New Financial Crisis." *Business Insider*. 20 Feb. 2011. Web.

¹⁵¹ "Bahrain Country Profile." *BBC News*. 22 Nov. 2011. Web.

¹⁵² "Bahrain Country Profile." *BBC News*. 22 Nov. 2011. Web.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Alsharif, Asma. "Gulf Bloc to Consider Jordan, Morocco Membership." *Reuters*. 10 May 2011. Web.

¹⁵⁵ "Bahrain Country Profile." *BBC News*. 22 Nov. 2011. Web.

¹⁵⁶ "Background Note: Bahrain." *U.S. Department of State*. 8 July 2011. Web.

As a member of the GCC, Bahrain cooperated with the United States and its allies against Iraq in the first Gulf War in 1991.¹⁵⁷ In October of this year, Bahrain joined the United States in a military agreement. As a result of their cooperation with the United States in this war, Bahrain became a large recipient of U.S. military aid and was given extensive training for their military.¹⁵⁸ Bahrain also served as a base for the United States and British during operation “Desert Fox” in which these allies bombed Iraq.¹⁵⁹ According to the State Department, the United States has given Bahrain at least 1.4 billion dollars of military aid from 2000 to the present.¹⁶⁰

Throughout the 1990s, Bahrain continued to struggle with sectarian divides. Emir Sheikh Isa Al-Khalifa established a 30-member council that was solely appointed by him.¹⁶¹ During this time, the main opposition leader Sheikh Salman was arrested and fled to Britain because he criticized this council and demanded equal representation. Similarly, other opposition leaders were arrested and released.¹⁶² These arrests led to civil clashes in Bahrain that are strikingly reminiscent of the protests today. Bahrain “uncovered” another coup plot by an Iranian backed group, Hizbollah Bahrain, in the midst of this civil unrest in the past.¹⁶³ Again, this shows that although the country has tried to modernize, adding 5 Shia members to this consultative council in 1995, they still constantly find Iranian influence in unrest.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁷ "Bahrain Country Profile." *BBC News*. 22 Nov. 2011. Web.

¹⁵⁸ "Background Note: Bahrain." *U.S. Department of State*. 8 July 2011. Web.

¹⁵⁹ "Bahrain Country Profile." *BBC News*. 22 Nov. 2011. Web.

¹⁶⁰ "Background Note: Bahrain." *U.S. Department of State*. 8 July 2011. Web.

¹⁶¹ "Bahrain Country Profile." *BBC News*. 22 Nov. 2011. Web.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

In 1999, Sheikh Isa died and was replaced by his son, the current King Hamad al-Khalifa.¹⁶⁵ One of the first moves by the new emir was to pardon a Shia opposition leader, Sheikh Abd-al-Amir al-Jamri, who had been sentenced to 10 years in prison during these uprisings.¹⁶⁶ It is clear that the new emir was looking to ameliorate these divisive sectarian fissures at the start of the millennium. To this end, the emir appointed the first women and non-Muslims to his council in late 2000.¹⁶⁷ The first decade of the new millennium was to be one of reform for Bahrain.

Sheikh Hamad al-Khalifa set himself up as a reformer with the above moves and a referendum in February 2001 wherein Bahrainis overwhelmingly voted for a constitutional monarchy.¹⁶⁸ Bahrain became a constitutional monarchy exactly one year later and women were allowed to vote and hold office as a result of this deal.¹⁶⁹ In May and October 2001, local and parliamentary elections were held and the turnout was high.¹⁷⁰

In 2004, Bahrain and the United States created a free trade agreement that was finally signed by President Bush in 2006.¹⁷¹ This free trade agreement, alongside the military cooperation with the United States, has made Bahrain an essential ally of the United States in the Persian Gulf. In November of 2006, elections yielded a parliament with 40% Shia representation and Jawad bin Salem al-Oraied, a Shia Muslim, was named deputy Prime Minister.¹⁷²

Bahrain continued, for the last half of this decade, with its rollercoaster of provocations against the Shia minority and simultaneous concessions. In 2007, a flood of foreign workers

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

came to Bahrain and took advantage of amnesty laws.¹⁷³ This was denounced by Shia Muslims as a way for the regime to adjust the balance of power. There are overwhelming amounts of foreign workers in Bahrain, many of who are Sunni and work in the King's security apparatus.¹⁷⁴ Thirty-eight percent of Bahrainis are foreign nationals and Bahrain struggles with high unemployment among its national population.¹⁷⁵ The unemployment in Bahrain stands at 20% and became such a problem that in 2009 the government ended tremendous subsidies for foreign workers.¹⁷⁶

In late 2008, several opposition members were arrested on suspicion of terrorism, but soon after their arrest, the King released 170 prisoners who were accused of "endangering" national security. Among these prisoners were 35 Shia accused of attempting to overthrow the state.¹⁷⁷ A pattern had emerged where the regime relinquished some power and then cracked down again. Shia parties were reportedly ready to make tremendous gains in September of 2010, but 20 opposition leaders were arrested for promoting violent protests and sabotage against the regime in the days before the election.¹⁷⁸ Because of these arrests, Shia made slender gains in the October elections. These tensions were ripe going into 2011.¹⁷⁹ Sectarian divides and regional concerns were compounded with failing economic conditions in the country.

In late 2009, it was clear that the credit crunch was slowing Bahrain's economy to a halt. As international capital slowed to a drip as a result of the worldwide financial crisis, Bahrain's

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Black, Ian. "Bahrain Security Forces Accused of Deliberately Recruiting Foreign Nationals." *The Guardian*. 17 Feb. 2011. Web.

¹⁷⁵ "Bahrain." *CIA World Factbook*. Central Intelligence Agency, 29 Nov. 2011. Web.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ "Bahrain Country Profile." *BBC News*. 22 Nov. 2011. Web.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

status as an international banking haunted them.¹⁸⁰ Al-Dur, a large power plant to be used for desalination in the arid Bahrain, went offline after capital both within and outside Bahrain dried up.¹⁸¹ The project worth \$2.2 billion was halted, as were so many other private industry projects, because of the fiscal crisis. It is under this backdrop of sectarianism, regional antagonism, and economic failure that protests began in Bahrain.

Recap of the Arab Spring in Bahrain: February – December 2011

This history of Bahrain through 2010 highlights several important factors that frame the protests occurring throughout the country this year. Sectarianism, economic concerns, and regional influence have played all-important roles in the conflict thus far. I will recount the events of the Arab Spring in Bahrain while concentrating on analysis of these events.

Bahraini protests began in February 2011 as similar protests swept across the Arab world. The first large-scale protest that drew international attention was Bahrain's "Day of Rage" on February 14th.¹⁸² Protests had simmered in the weeks leading up to this day. King Hamad promised looser controls on the media and gave the equivalent of \$2,700 to each family in the kingdom.¹⁸³ Protesters were calling for changes, which included a fully elected parliament and the end of perceived discrimination against the Shia majority in Bahrain.¹⁸⁴ Most importantly, decision-making capabilities were to be transferred to the parliament, as the monarchy is the

¹⁸⁰ Goma, Eman. "Credit Crunch Delays Bahrain's Power, Water Projects - GIC." *Arabian Business*. 19 Jan. 2009. Web.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Kerr, Simeon. "Police Crack Down on Bahrain 'Day of Rage'." *Middle East and North Africa*. The Financial Times, 14 Feb. 2011. Web.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

perceived hub of discrimination against the Shia.¹⁸⁵ This was the first sign of a protest in an “oil rich Gulf state” and it sent fear through the regimes of the Arabian Peninsula.¹⁸⁶

Protests in Bahrain caused Barclays Capital to view the state with “increased caution” given the “deteriorating fiscal conditions and simmering political tensions.”¹⁸⁷ As was noted earlier, the international credit crisis hit Bahrain hard; it has an extremely high budget deficit and the lowest credit rating from Moody’s (A3) in the Gulf.¹⁸⁸ Bahrain’s lack of oil makes it more susceptible to protests; in contrast to Kuwait’s 2.3 billion barrels of oil a year while Bahrain only exported 200,000 barrels in 2010.¹⁸⁹ At the same time, tourism fell by 80% and deeply damaged the Bahraini economy.¹⁹⁰ The economy has become so weak that in November, Bahrain resorted to selling a \$750 million dollar Islamic bond to finance its budget deficit.¹⁹¹

Returning to the beginning of February, after the “Day of Rage”, protests escalated in Bahrain. Police fired upon a funeral for a protester killed during the day before.¹⁹² At the same time, Bahrain’s largest opposition bloc Al-Wifaq withdrew its membership from Parliament until violence against protesters ended and reforms were achieved.¹⁹³ Al-Wifaq occupied about 18 out of 40 seats in the parliament.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Wigglesworth, Robin, and Simeon Kerr. "Bahrain: 'Day of Rage' Simmers." *Beyond Brics*. The Financial Times, 14 Feb. 2011. Web.

¹⁸⁷ Wigglesworth, Robin, and Simeon Kerr. "Bahrain: 'Day of Rage' Simmers." *Beyond Brics*. The Financial Times, 14 Feb. 2011. Web.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ "Bahrain Oil Company Fires Almost 300 Over Anti-government Protests." *The Guardian*. 11 May 2011. Web.

¹⁹¹ "Bahrain Sells \$750m Islamic Bond." *Gulf News*. 18 Nov. 2011. Web.

¹⁹² Black, Ian. "Bahrain Police Open Fire on Funeral Procession Leaving One Dead." *The Guardian*. 15 Feb. 2011. Web.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

Protests during this week in February had amassed around Pearl Roundabout in the heart of Manama. On February 17th, the Thursday after the protests began, security forces raided the camp at the roundabout and killed 3 protesters while injuring scores of others.¹⁹⁵ Ambulances were not allowed to travel to the square to aid protesters. The crackdown enraged protesters, especially because they see the security forces as Sunnis recruited from other states by King Hamad in order to ensure monopoly on force in the country.¹⁹⁶ The military closed down streets, declared a curfew, and outlawed any public gatherings.¹⁹⁷ These measures would not be enough to stop the protests rocking the country.

These protests continued for a month until the regime reached a breaking point. On March 14, troops from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar entered Bahrain to help quell the protests that had plagued the regime and harmed the economic prospects of the Gulf Cooperation Council.¹⁹⁸ On the next day, the regime declared martial law in the country.¹⁹⁹ The declaration of martial law coincided with the arrest of six opposition leaders for contacting “foreign agents”, again raising the specter of Iranian influence in Bahrain.²⁰⁰ March 18th, on Friday in a Muslim state, the regime destroyed the majestic Pearl Roundabout. This site had served as a focal point for the protests in Manama since the early days of the protests in February.²⁰¹ The Al-Khalifa family sent a clear message with its use of foreign troops and its destruction of this landmark: the regime will not limit its actions to save its image when contested with growing protests. As was

¹⁹⁵ Chulov, Martin. "Bahrain's Quiet Anger Turns to Rage." *The Guardian*. 17 Feb. 2011. Web.

¹⁹⁶ Chulov, Martin. "Bahrain's Quiet Anger Turns to Rage." *The Guardian*. 17 Feb. 2011. Web.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Tisdall, Simon. "Bahrain Royal Family Welcomes Saudi Troops to Face Down Violent Protests." *The Guardian*. 14 Mar. 2011. Web.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Chulov, Martin. "Bahrain Arrests Six Opposition Leaders for 'Contacting Foreign Agents'" *The Guardian*. 17 Mar. 2011. Web.

²⁰¹ Churlov, Martin. "Bahrain Destroys Pearl Roundabout." *The Guardian*. 18 Mar. 2011. Web.

noted earlier, however, the Bahraini regime has a habit of tempering crackdown with alleged reform.

Allegations of sectarian driven violence, plainclothes thugs with accents different than those in Bahrain, and systematic intimidation in Shia strongholds on the part of the regime became commonplace throughout the remainder of the spring as protests simmered.²⁰² It wasn't until June 29th that King Hamad ordered an independent commission to question the regime's role in the violent crackdown and human rights abuses in the protests during February and March.²⁰³ The call for this report coincided with opposition talks that began on July 2nd.²⁰⁴ Al-Wifaq agreed to participate in the talks at the last moment.²⁰⁵ Perhaps their decision came because the King called for this report. The talks consisted of 300 delegates from all different parties and were meant to tackle issues that the protesters had been revolting against for months.²⁰⁶

Protests and crackdowns continued throughout opposition talks, which were not successful in their own right. According to Al-Wifaq, the talks were designed to fail from the very beginning, and the balance of voices was inherently unequal.²⁰⁷ There were 325 participants on the committee and only 25 of them were Shia.²⁰⁸ Only four of these were from Al-Wifaq; the other members of Al-Wifaq were imprisoned by the regime.²⁰⁹ To compound matters, there were no representatives from the monarchy and the talks were not getting at the "root causes" of the

²⁰² Mahmoud. "A Chilling Account of the Brutal Clampdown Sweeping Bahrain." *The Guardian*. 16 Apr. 2011. Web.

²⁰³ Ali, Halima. "Bahrain's King Orders Investigation into Human Rights Abuses at Protests." *The Guardian*. 29 June 2011. Web.

²⁰⁴ "Bahrain Opposition Joins Talks." *The Guardian*. 2 July 2011. Web.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ "Bahrain Country Profile." *BBC News*. 22 Nov. 2011. Web.

²⁰⁸ Chick, Kristen. "Bahrain Opposition on Verge of Pulling Out of Government Talks." *The Christian Science Monitor*. 15 July 2011. Web.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

protests.²¹⁰ Al-Wifaq threatened to drop out, stalling the talks, and its constituents demanded their withdrawal from what they saw as a corrupt political process.²¹¹

The summer drew on with simmering protests and frozen opposition talks. On November 23, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry report was issued.²¹² The Bahraini regime “welcomed” the report,²¹³ but disagreed with many of its findings. The regime admits that the report is correct in its assertion that the “excessive force” was used when the regime killed 35 protesters during February and March.²¹⁴ The report confirmed that there was “no discernable” influence on the protests from the Iran, a charge with the regime disagreed with.²¹⁵ The report has only emboldened the protesters and the regime continues to stoke sectarian tensions by remaining steadfast in its charge that Iran has played a role.²¹⁶

The report itself provides no suggestions as to where improvements may be made and the regime does not seem to be moving toward real reform.²¹⁷ Protests have intensified after the release of the report for this reason. Again, the regime has cracked down on protesters, even with outside journalists like Nick Kristof of *The New York Times* reporting on this violence.²¹⁸ Just hours before the report was issued, security forces dispersed protesters forcibly in the Shia dominated neighborhood of A’ali.²¹⁹ Bahrain, it is clear, is stuck in a cycle of repression and

²¹⁰ Chick, Kristen. "Bahrain Opposition on Verge of Pulling Out of Government Talks." *The Christian Science Monitor*. 15 July 2011. Web.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Black, Ian. "King Hamad of Bahrain Welcomes Report Accusing Kingdom of Torture." *The Guardian*. 23 Nov. 2011. Web.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Jones, Toby. "We Know What Happened in Bahrain: Now What?" *Sada*. Carnegie Endowment, 1 Dec. 2011. Web.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Black, Ian. "King Hamad of Bahrain Welcomes Report Accusing Kingdom of Torture." *The Guardian*. 23 Nov. 2011. Web.

²¹⁷ Bahrain. Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry. *BICI Report*. Print.

²¹⁸ Kristof, Nick. "Repressing Democracy with American Arms." *The New York Times*. 17 Dec. 2011. Web.

²¹⁹ Jones, Toby. "We Know What Happened in Bahrain: Now What?" *Sada*. Carnegie Endowment, 1 Dec. 2011. Web.

outward concessions, although these concessions are not substantial. The international community should be well aware of disturbing allegations against the regime that have been confirmed by several sources.

One such allegation is the systematic repression and force used against doctors and medics in Bahrain. These doctors were targeted because hospitals have served as safe houses for dissidents throughout the protests, and more importantly, they hold the evidence of the atrocities committed by the regime.²²⁰ The Guardian reports that 32 doctors had been held by the regime for helping protesters through April.²²¹ In September, twenty medics were sentenced to jail for “crimes against the state.”²²² These doctors and medics claim that the regime is jailing them for their role in the protests and because they have spoken to the international media.²²³ This is a “severe breach of medical ethics and human rights.”²²⁴ The regime agreed later to try these doctors and medics in civilian court, but they are still being held without trial.²²⁵ The international community should be appalled by these events.

The Bahraini regime has fired those who stand up against the government as well. In May, Bahrain fired 300 employees from its state-run oil company because of their role in the protests throughout the spring.²²⁶ Similarly, 57 workers were laid off recently from state-run agencies in Bahrain.²²⁷ Perhaps most disturbingly, teachers have been laid off this month for their roles in the protests as well.²²⁸ These moves were so troubling that the United States sent a

²²⁰ "Bahrain Accused of Systematic Attacks on Doctors." *The Guardian*. 22 Dec. 2011. Web.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Chulov, Martin. "Bahrain Doctors Jailed for Treating Injured Protesters." *The Guardian*. 29 Sept. 2011. Web.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Curtis, Kim. "Politicizing Medicine in Bahrain." *Foreign Policy Blogs*. 15 Dec. 2011. Web.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ "Bahrain Oil Company Fires Almost 300 Over Anti-government Protests." *The Guardian*. 11 May 2011. Web.

²²⁷ "57 Workers Suspended." *Al-Wasat News*. 12 Nov. 2011. Web

²²⁸ Ibid.

labor team to investigate these allegations.²²⁹ The United States and Bahrain have important free trade ties, which were noted above, but if suspensions and dismissals of state employees continue these ties may be in jeopardy. Similarly, the United States has extensive military ties with Bahrain and the 5th Navy Fleet is housed there.²³⁰ This leads to a discussion of the geostrategic concerns with Bahrain for the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Iran.

Geopolitical and International Concerns

It is clear that Bahrain holds not only a strategic location in the Persian Gulf but that it is also important to the success of the GCC and the international economy at large. For this reason, many countries have a significant stake in Bahrain's future. Below, I will discuss the concerns for United States and its allies, Saudi Arabia, and Iran throughout the protests in Bahrain.

Iran

According to CSIS, Bahrain is of obvious strategic importance for the Iranian regime. Iran has strong control over al-Haq, a Bahraini opposition group within the country, and has supported the Shia uprisings in Bahrain in the past.²³¹ Bahrain has trade ties with Iran, but these ties are shaky given Iranian rhetoric regarding Bahrain as "a province of Iran."²³²

The Sunni regime is perpetually scared of the Iranian influence within the country. The Bahraini regime went as far as to ban flights from Iran during the protests because it is deeply

²²⁹Murphy, Brian. "US Labor Team Probes Job Purges in Bahrain." *Boston.com*. 26 Oct. 2011. Web.

²³⁰Ibid.

²³¹ Alsis, Peter, Marissa Allison, and Anthony Cordesman. "US and Iranian Strategic Competition in the Gulf States and Yemen." *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (2011). Print.

²³² Ibid., 23

afraid of these connections.²³³ A bomb exploded outside the British embassy in Bahrain on December 5th and the blame was quickly placed on Iran because of the escalating tensions between Iran and Britain.²³⁴ As was noted earlier, several coup plots have been uncovered in Bahrain's history involving an Iranian hand.

It is no doubt that the fall of the Sunni regime, or a weakening of its power through these protests, would be in Iran's interest. With control over the Strait of Hormuz, Bahrain could serve as a friendly government in the Persian Gulf. The Iranian regime would shift the balance of power dramatically with the fall of the Al-Khalifa crown. There are increasing signs of a "Cold War" in the Gulf regarding the build up of arms between a nuclear-ambitious Iran and the Saudi crown.²³⁵ Related to this point, the Iranian regime would love to see its nuclear ambitions fulfilled and feels greatly threatened by the 5th Naval Fleet in Bahrain. It is in Iran's strategic influence to keep these protests simmering,²³⁶ if not overthrowing the regime, in order to increase its power in the region.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has extremely close ties with the Sunni monarchy in Bahrain and the King Fahd Causeway, which stretches over the Gulf of Bahrain, connects these two countries. Saudi Arabia is gravely concerned about the Al-Khalifa regime falling and the implications for this event would have for their security in the Gulf. Saudi Arabia now has to worry about an

²³³ Grewal, Sandeep. "Iran-Iraq Flights Ban Is Extended." *Gulf Daily News*. 31 Oct. 2011. Web.

²³⁴ Morris, Loveday. "Bomb Blast Outside UK Embassy in Bahrain." *The Independent*. 05 Dec. 2011. Web.

²³⁵ Apps, Peter. "Analysis: Cold War with Iran Heats Up Across Mideast." *Reuters.com*. 05 Dec. 2011. Web.

²³⁶ Ibid.

antagonistic regime in Iraq and is concerned about being so closely connected to a possibly hostile government in Bahrain. Thus, Saudi Arabia has spared no cost and no arms in keeping the protests at a minimum in Bahrain.²³⁷

Saudi Arabia has supported the regime in such a way because across the King Fahd Causeway lies Shia population in Saudi Arabia that has increasingly been prone to protests. The oil rich area of Saudi Arabia in the east is home to a majority of the country's Shia population, and as of late, violent protests have erupted in Qatif.²³⁸ Saudi Arabia thus far has had enough money to subdue its population, but one has to wonder how long a regime can last with such a tragic human rights record. The concern of "spill over" protests from Bahrain may be even greater than the concerns over Iran gaining influence in the region. Any economic disturbance in the Gulf States would not only be detrimental for Saudi Arabia, but it would be extremely harmful for the West.

The United States

The United States clearly has a close partner in both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain and is concerned about Iran's role in the Middle East in the absence of allied presence in Iraq. For this reason, the United States has been engaging in a difficult balancing act in Bahrain. Although the United States supports democratic revolutions across the world, Bahrain is one of the most strategically important partners the West has in the Middle East today.

As was noted before, the United States has extensive trade and military ties with Bahrain. Bahrain houses the 5th Naval Fleet, which is integral to the U.S. presence in the Gulf. Hilary Clinton condemned the use of force on Bahraini protesters by the regime and called for a

²³⁷ "Gulf States Send Forces to Bahrain Following Protests." *BBC News*. 14 Mar. 2011. Web.

²³⁸ "Saudi Arabia Police Open Fire at Protest in Qatif." *BBC - Homepage*. 10 Mar. 2011. Web.

“peaceful solution” in early May.²³⁹ The United States also was slated to deliver a large cache of arms to Bahrain, but this deal was delayed because of the crackdown on protesters. The United States waited for the BICI Report to be issued, but has yet to reach a conclusion on whether these arms will be delivered.²⁴⁰ Since Clinton’s condemnation of the regime, the United States has been silent on Bahrain. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, the United States has been wildly inconsistent with this policy and it is possible that repression may make Bahrain “more unstable.”²⁴¹ As protests continue on, this seems to be a likely conclusion.

The British have been a little louder in their critique of the Bahraini regime. Prime Minister David Cameron pled with King Hamad for reform in a personal meeting this month.²⁴² In an interesting development, both British and American nationals have found key positions with the Bahraini regime in support of “reform.” John Yates of Scotland Yard and John Timoney of Miami Police Department have both been hired by the regime to implement reform of the security apparatus.²⁴³ Similarly, Tom Squitieri, a disgraced journalist from the United States, has been hired by the crown to work on its “public relations.”²⁴⁴ The amount of foreign help to the Bahraini government, especially from Western citizens, will only provide more fodder for opposition groups and Iran who will reassert that the Bahraini regime is a puppet of the West. This will only hurt the strategic influence of the United States in Bahrain, as the economy continues to stall if not plummet.

Conclusions & Implications

²³⁹ "Clinton Criticises Bahrain Over Protester Clashes." *BBC News*. 16 Mar. 2011. Web.

²⁴⁰ Wolf, Jim. "U.S. Delays Bahrain Arms Sale Pending Rights Probe." *Reuters*. 19 Oct. 2011. Web.

²⁴¹ Lagon, Mark P. "Promoting Human Rights: Is U.S. Consistency Desirable or Possible?" *Council on Foreign Relations*. Oct. 2011. Web.

²⁴² "Cameron Urges Bahrain's King Hamad to Implement Reforms." *BBC News*. 12 Dec. 2011. Web.

²⁴³ "AFP: US and British Ex-Police Chiefs to Help Bahrain Reform Drive." *Google News*. 2 Dec. 2011. Web.

²⁴⁴ Silverstein, Ken. "How Bahrain Works Washington." *Salon*. 8 Dec. 2011. Web.

Protests in Bahrain do not seem to be coming to an end. If anything, the Bahraini Independent Commission of Inquiry report released in late November has reenergized the opposition. The security apparatus of the Al-Khalifa crown has continued its violent suppression of protesters this past week.²⁴⁵ The allegations of economic warfare and brutal torture by the regime are pervasive and ignite new protests each day. Tensions are continuing to rise between Saudi Arabia and Iran. As the West looks to place more stringent sanctions on Iran, Bahrain may become ripe ground for a proxy war.

These concerns, combined with the underlying sectarian and economic conditions in Bahrain, will provide fuel for these protests in the weeks and months to come. The Bahraini monarchy is unlikely to fall, but of all the countries that have witnessed upheaval this year, the Bahraini crown is the most susceptible. The international community has largely ignored Bahrain but this conflict is ignored with great peril. Continued violence in Bahrain will have severe economic and strategic repercussions not only for the country itself, but also for the entire international community.

Qatar

Athina Doutis

The revolutionary fervor gripping the Middle East during the Arab Spring has seemed to bypass certain countries in the region, notably Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates. While there have been some small murmurs of change in these nations, they remain largely unaffected by the large-scale political and social upheaval occurring in neighboring states. In the

²⁴⁵ Kristof, Nick. "Repressing Democracy with American Arms." *The New York Times*. 17 Dec. 2011. Web.

case of Qatar, the Arab Spring has actually had the effect of boosting the country's status on the international stage; the Emir, Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, has become a major player both in regional and global politics as the leaders of surrounding countries have been preoccupied with either quashing rebellion or placating their people to avoid rebellion.

Qatar, on the other hand, has over the last two decades seen a slow rise in political legitimacy through liberalization of the economy and domestic politics (although it remains an absolute monarchy), as well as a burgeoning reputation as an objective mediator in international dispute settlement and a forward-thinking nation evolving rapidly while surrounding governments stagnate. While the nation prospers from oil revenue and foreign investment, the Emir is rebranding his country into the Arab nation of tomorrow.

From Protectorate to Emirate

The peninsula of Qatar is often referred to as a 'tiny thumb of land' jutting into the Persian Gulf. It shares a land border with Saudi Arabia, but other neighboring countries include Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates. Originally inhabited by tribes engaged in the fishing and pearling trades, Qatar became a British Protectorate in 1916, with a treaty establishing the Al-Thani family as rulers.²⁴⁶ Oil was first discovered in 1939, but due to the fighting of WWII, production and exportation didn't begin in earnest until the late 1940s.²⁴⁷ Qatar joined the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1961²⁴⁸, and is now estimated to produce 1.4 million barrels per day.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ CIA, "Qatar," *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/qa.html>

²⁴⁷ "History of Qatar: the Discovery of Oil," Middle East Arab, <http://middleeastarab.com/qa/history-qatar-discovery-oil.html>

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ CIA, "Field Listing: Oil Production," *The World Factbook*,

Qatar gained its independence in 1971, when the United Kingdom withdrew from the area, and a provisional constitution was adopted under Sheikh Khalifa Bin Hamad Al-Thani.²⁵⁰ While the monarchy remains in control and accountable to no one, the constitution established that the Emir is not allowed to violate Shari ‘a law – for the official religion of Qatar is Sunni Islam²⁵¹ – and is also obligated to confer with leading families and clerics on major national decisions.²⁵² As such, the Emir established a 35-member Advisory council, the Majlis al-Shura, in 1971.²⁵³ Under the Sheikh Khalifa, the oil industry prospered following a series of production sharing agreements with foreign companies, as did the gas industry when production and exportation began in 1991.²⁵⁴ Other industries such as petrochemicals and the production of construction materials flourished as well. He was also keen on raising the international profile of his country, establishing a foreign ministry shortly after taking rule.²⁵⁵

The New Emir and a Slow Rise to International Prominence

In 1995, Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the son of Sheikh Khalifa, quietly overthrew his father and took power of the country.²⁵⁶ Under the new Emir, major economic and political reforms took place; some have gone so far as to call him “representative of an emerging new generation of Gulf leadership.”²⁵⁷ In 1999, for the first time, elections were held to elect members of the newly established Central Municipal Council (CMC), a body aiming to improve

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2173.html>

²⁵⁰ “History of Qatar,” Middle East Arab, <http://middleeastarab.com/qa/history-qatar.html>

²⁵¹ U.S Department of State, “Background Note: Qatar,” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5437.htm>

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ CIA, “Qatar,” *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/qa.html>

²⁵⁴ Amiri Diwan – State of Qatar, “Shaikh Khalifa Bin Hamed Al Thani,” <http://www.diwan.gov.qa/english/qatar/KhalifaBinHamad.htm>

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ “Rulers of Qatar,” Middle East Arab, <http://middleeastarab.com/qa/rulers-qatar.html>

²⁵⁷ Jeremy M. Sharp, “Qatar: Background and U.S. Relations,” Congressional Research Service Report for Congress (March 17 2004): p.2, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/33741.pdf>

the provision of services in the municipalities of the country.²⁵⁸ A new constitution was also ratified by public referendum in 2003, and was put into effect in 2005.²⁵⁹ Sheikh Hamad has also revamped the nation's energy infrastructure and reformed the education system.

Currently, the population of Qatar is estimated to be around 1.4 million, although only about 20% of them are Qatari nationals.²⁶⁰ While Arabic is the official language, English is used widely. Like much of the Arab world, the Qatari people is a young one: 30 is the median age of the local population. Unemployment is estimated to be 1.5 %; this is probably due to the high literacy rate – almost 90% - and large urban population – 96% of the inhabitants of Qatar live in one of the country's main cities.²⁶¹

Qatar boasts an HDI of 0.831, ranking 37th in the world according to the most recent UNDP Human Development Report.²⁶² In addition to the high standards of living, education, and health, Qatar is also religiously and socially more liberal than many of its neighbors. Although Sunni Islam is the state religion, other religious practices are becoming more and more accepted in the public eye. In 2008, the first official church (a Catholic one) was opened in Doha. Inhabitants of the country are also permitted to consume alcohol, and there is no restrictive dress code imposed on women.²⁶³

The role of women was another issue tackled by the new Emir upon ascending t power. In 1996, he established the Women's Affairs Department, whose goal was to better integrate

²⁵⁸ "CIA, "Qatar," *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/qa.html>

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Qatar," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5437.htm>

²⁶¹ "CIA, "Qatar," *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/qa.html>

²⁶² "Qatar Country Profile: Human Development Indicators," UNDP, <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/QAT.html>

²⁶³ "Qatar Profile," BBC, November 1 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14702609>

women into Qatari civil and professional society.²⁶⁴ In 1998, he gave women the right to vote and run as candidates in elections, a decree which has been confirmed in the new 2003 constitution.²⁶⁵

Sheikh Hamad also spearheaded a major reform of media within Qatar, abolishing the Qatari Ministry of Information – an entity responsible for media censorship in most Gulf nations.²⁶⁶ In 1996, he launched the Al-Jazeera television channel, which originally broadcasted only in Arabic but now accompanied by a sister channel in English (and also available in a series of other languages).²⁶⁷ Purported to be independent of government control, Al-Jazeera has been disparaged as being the mouthpiece of the Qatari ruling elite. Freedom House has also categorized the general Qatari press as “not free,” pointing out the lack of criticism for the ruling elites of its own country, and the fact that all media outlets are in some way owned by the aforementioned elites.²⁶⁸ As regards reporting the events in the region, though, Al-Jazeera is notably more informative and controversial than other media outlets – as evidenced by its recent coverage of the Arab Spring.

Qatar’s leading role in a post-Arab Spring Middle East has slowly been building since Sheikh Hamad became the nation’s leader 16 years ago. His government has cultivated useful political and economic relationship not only in the region, but around the world, and is now considered a valued international partner by many diverse nations both diplomatically and militarily.

²⁶⁴ “Qatari Women,” Embassy of the State of Qatar in Washington DC, <http://www.qatarembassy.net/women.asp>

²⁶⁵ Ebtisam Al Kitbi, “Women’s Political Status in the GCC States,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 20 2004 <http://carnegieendowment.org/2008/08/20/women-s-political-status-in-gcc-states/6bgb>

²⁶⁶ “History of Al Jazeera Television,” Allied Media Corporation, http://www.allied-media.com/aljazeera/jazeera_history.html

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ “Map of Press Freedom : Qatar (2011),” Freedom House, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&year=2011>

Economically, Qatar has significant interdependent relationships with countries all over the world. One of its main regional associations is with Iran. The two countries are both members of the NAM (Non-Aligned Movement), the OIC (Organization of Islamic Countries), and OPEC.²⁶⁹ They also share a massive gas field, and thus, despite disagreeing with many Iranian policies, Qatar manages to maintain stable diplomatic and economic ties with that country. It is, in fact, the largest exporter of gas in the world, and exports to such countries as the UK, Japan, China, and the US.²⁷⁰ Russia is another country with which Qatar maintains good diplomatic relations thanks to common goals in the gas production sector.²⁷¹

Qatar's primary military relationship is with the United States. US Central Command is hosted in Qatar, at Al-Udeid Airbase, the largest US military base outside of the United States.²⁷² (Qatar also pays for 60% of the upkeep of this base, presumably in return for US security to the country.²⁷³) During the war in Afghanistan, this location provided major logistical support for the military operations; in the Iraq war, Al-Udeid base was expanded into the 'nerve center' of the operation.²⁷⁴

Qatar has also been a useful intermediary in a number of international conflicts. Intermediaries of the government have with relative diplomatic success brokered negotiations in

²⁶⁹ Will Fulton & Ariel Farrar-Wellman, "Qatar-Iran Foreign Relations," Iran Tracker, <http://www.irantracker.org/foreign-relations/qatar-iran-foreign-relations>

²⁷⁰ Christian Coates Ulrichsen, "Qatar and the Arab Spring," ETH – Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich, April

14 2011, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Current-Affairs/ISN-Insights/Detail?lng=en&id=128409&contextid734=128409&contextid735=128408&tabid=128408>

²⁷¹ Will Fulton & Ariel Farrar-Wellman, "Qatar-Iran Foreign Relations," Iran Tracker, <http://www.irantracker.org/foreign-relations/qatar-iran-foreign-relations>

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ "Qatar Profile," BBC, November 1 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14702609>

Djibouti, Eritrea, and Yemen.²⁷⁵ During 2008, when warring factions of the Lebanese government were on a direct path to civil war, Qatari emissaries succeeded in brokering a peace settlement between the parties, narrowly avoiding a civil war²⁷⁶. Qatar was also the only Arab country to have diplomatic relations with Israel, a situation made even more unique by its relationships with both Hamas and Hezbollah.²⁷⁷ In fact, Qatar has attempted to organize peace talks between Israeli and Palestinian leadership in the past.²⁷⁸ However, in 2009, Qatar cut its ties to Israel after the Gaza flotilla incident, in which nine passengers were killed by Israeli commandos who boarded one of the ships attempting to break an Israeli-imposed naval blockade on the Gaza Strip.²⁷⁹

One conflict which has been a resounding success for Qatari mediation is that in Darfur. Although the UN and EU have been major players in attempting to broker a peace, it was at Qatari-mediated talks where results began to materialize. Qatar was also responsible for mobilizing support for action on the international stage, providing funding for conflict resolution initiatives, and sending a delegation to promote the agreement amongst the Darfuri people.²⁸⁰ The Darfur issue, though, is not the only arena in which Qatar has relations with Sudan. After the secession of South Sudan, Qatar has signed multiple economic agreements with Sudan. A number of joint committees and projects have thus been planned. They will involve the private

²⁷⁵ Christian Coates Ulrichsen, "Qatar and the Arab Spring," ETH – Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich, April

14 2011, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Current-Affairs/ISN-Insights/Detail?lng=en&id=128409&contextid734=128409&contextid735=128408&tabid=128408>

²⁷⁶ "Qatar Urges Sudan and Darfur to Make Concessions," Dalje.com, May 27 2009, <http://dalje.com/en-world/qatar-urges-sudan-and-darfur-to-make-concessions/261111>

²⁷⁷ Robin Lustig, "Tiny Qatar's Growing Global Clout," BBC, April 30 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13229852>

²⁷⁸ "Qatar Urges Sudan and Darfur to Make Concessions," Dalje.com, May 27 2009, <http://dalje.com/en-world/qatar-urges-sudan-and-darfur-to-make-concessions/261111>

²⁷⁹ "Qatar Profile," BBC, November 1 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14702609>

²⁸⁰ "Editorial: Sudan and Qatar, a Modern Relationship," *Sudan Vision*, December 5 2011, <http://news.sudanvisiondaily.com/details.html?rsnpid=202879>

and public sectors, and focus on energy and infrastructure, thus improving the investment climate in Sudan and allowing other countries to follow suit.²⁸¹

Decisive Action during the Arab Spring

While unaffected by revolution or dissent, Qatar has in no way been a wallflower during the Arab Spring either politically or militarily. Al-Jazeera has in many ways been the mouthpiece of revolutions taking place around the Middle East and North Africa, with coverage creating controversy around the region. The Qatari military also quietly participated in aiding the Bahraini royal family subdue the rebellion in that country – a move which has hurt Qatar’s credibility as a supporter of democracy in the region.²⁸² Conversely, Qatar was unabashed when calling for the resignation of Yemeni leader Ali Abdullah Saleh,²⁸³ as well as in its coverage of the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia on Al-Jazeera.²⁸⁴

Qatar’s most highly publicized role during the Arab Spring was its participation in the intervention in support of the anti-Ghaddafi rebels in Libya. Arab League support, which was crucial for the legitimacy of the implementation of the NATO No-Fly-Zone, was rallied by the Qatari government; six Qatari Mirage fighter jets also joined the NATO operation.²⁸⁵ Al-Jazeera coverage of the Libyan conflict was also heavily in favor of the rebels, and the Qatari

²⁸¹ “Sudan, Qatar sign Six Co-op Agreements,” *China Daily*, December 5 2011,

http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2011-12/05/content_14215902.htm

²⁸² Christian Coates Ulrichsen, “Qatar and the Arab Spring,” ETH – Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich, April

14 2011, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Current-Affairs/ISN-Insights/Detail?lng=en&id=128409&contextid734=128409&contextid735=128408&tabid=128408>

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Eric Pfanner, “Arab Spring Reshapes Market for TV News,” *New York Times*, October 30 2011,

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/31/technology/31iht-arabtv31.html?pagewanted=2&r=2&sq=qatar&st=cse&scp=21>

²⁸⁵ David Roberts, “Behind Qatar’s Intervention in Libya,” *Foreign Affairs*, September 28 2011,

<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/68302/david-roberts/behind-qatars-intervention-in-libya?page=show>

government was one of the first to recognize the Interim Transitional National Council in Benghazi.²⁸⁶ Qatar also funneled millions of dollars in funding to the rebels, while providing them with a wide variety of arms and military advisors who helped train the rebel fighters. It has even been reported that Qatari soldiers were seen participating in fighting on the ground.²⁸⁷

Post-Ghaddafi, Qatar has not withdrawn from its involvement with the Libyan conflict. After recognizing the Interim Government, Qatar has come to represent a sort of middle ground between what the Western powers want for that country – a friendly democracy – and the emerging reality of a more conservative, Islamist-led government.²⁸⁸ In fact, accusations have been leveled at the Qatari government that they actively supported the rise of Islamists among the rebels.²⁸⁹ The Emir has even been quoted as saying that Islamists are the most likely representatives of the upcoming political order in the region, and that the West needs to be able to engage with such parties if there is to be constructive cooperation with the area.²⁹⁰ This has baffled some observers, who do not see a connection between Qatari support for democracy on one hand, and its support for leaders who may make it difficult for post-revolution Arab states to make the transition to a Western-style democracy on the other hand. However, this is just another example of how Qatar continues to maintain good relations with important figures across

²⁸⁶ Christian Coates Ulrichsen, "Qatar and the Arab Spring," ETH – Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich, April

14 2011, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Current-Affairs/ISN-Insights/Detail?lng=en&id=128409&contextid734=128409&contextid735=128408&tabid=128408>

²⁸⁷ David Roberts, "Behind Qatar's Intervention in Libya," *Foreign Affairs*, September 28 2011, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/68302/david-roberts/behind-qatars-intervention-in-libya?page=show>

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ David D. Kirkpatrick & Rick Gladstone, "Libya's Interim Leader Asks NATO to Stay Through the End of 2011," *New York Times*, October 26, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/27/world/middleeast/libya-leader-wants-nato-presence-through-2011.html?sq=qatar&st=cse&adxnnl=1&scp=7&adxnnlx=1324382422-YGo7rs3w5ohCJdVOKH1pZA>

²⁹⁰ "Qatar Urges West to Embrace Islamists in Wake of Arab Spring," *Haaretz*, December 1 2011, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/qatar-urges-west-to-embrace-islamists-in-wake-of-arab-spring-1.398901>

the political spectrum, positioning itself to become a major power player while avoiding similar internal strife in its own territory.

An Evolution in Policy for the Middle East of Tomorrow

What was it that allowed Qatar to escape the biggest upheaval in the region since the start Iraq war? The oil and gas wealth inundating the country, as well as high levels of foreign investment and a growth rate of almost 20%, are keeping the small local population happy with the status quo.²⁹¹ Non-Qataris are not given citizenship, and their sojourns in the country are tightly regulated by visas and no-tolerance laws. As non-citizens, their options for protesting are extremely limited, and so if the citizens are happy, then “there’s no reason to protest.”²⁹² In such a state of prosperity –Qatar has the highest GDP per capita in the world²⁹³ – even democracy is seen as superfluous by most citizens.²⁹⁴

Much like Dubai and Abu Dhabi, Qatar is seen as a sort of oasis of modernity in the region. Many high-profile international institutions, including leading American universities, have campuses in Doha’s Education City. The Doha Debates, a forum where controversial topics can be discussed freely, are also seen as a beacon of open-mindedness. Winning the privilege of hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup was another coup in international circles – this one social rather than political.²⁹⁵ Another step in the direction of further democratization is Sheikh

²⁹¹ Robin Lustig, “Have Oman and Qatar Escaped the Arab Revolts?” BBC, April 20 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13147271>

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Zamila Bunglawala, “The Bloodless Arab Spring,” *New Statesman*, November 2 2011, <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2011/11/qatar-arab-democracy>

²⁹⁴ Robin Lustig, “Have Oman and Qatar Escaped the Arab Revolts ? BBC, April 20 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13147271>

²⁹⁵ Christian Coates Ulrichsen, “Qatar and the Arab Spring,” ETH – Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich, April

14 2011, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Current-Affairs/ISN-Insights/Detail?lng=en&id=128409&contextid734=128409&contextid735=128408&tabid=128408>

Hamad's declaration that he will hold national elections for members of the Advisory Council in 2013, despite the fact that there has been no call from the people on the subject. The Emir's voluntary move towards democracy is an excellent way for Qatar to cement its burgeoning reputation.²⁹⁶

Politically speaking, Qatar has managed to secure itself an important role in the shaping of tomorrow's Middle East. As host of the US military, major player in the Arab League, and media champion of Arab Spring rebellions via Al-Jazeera, Qatar is poised for affecting change in the region. However, a delicate game must now be played by the Emir: Qatar has supported some rebellions (Libya, Yemen) while helping to subdue others (Bahrain); Al-Jazeera's coverage of certain leaders (Yemen, Syria) is certain to have alienated some of its prior allies; Qatari support for change in the region must neither be too Western-friendly nor condemn any unforeseen yet democratic curveballs (such as the high number of votes received by conservative Muslim parties in the vote in Egypt). If Sheikh Hamad wants to see his nation take a leading role within the region, he must take care to adapt his foreign and domestic policies accordingly.

Conclusion

Through looking at each of these countries, one can better understand the reasons for these protests and the implications of this unrest geo-strategically not only for these respective countries but for the international community at large. Although there are certain players that would be greatly affected by significant upheaval in these countries, it is clear that in the world today a revolution in any of these countries would have a great effect on the international economy and would change the course of history.

²⁹⁶ Zamila Bunglawala, "The Bloodless Arab Spring," *New Statesman*, November 2 2011, <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2011/11/qatar-arab-democracy>

It is clear that the Arab Spring has manifested itself in different forms in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Qatar. Though close in proximity to one another, the protests witnessed this year throughout the Middle East has varied greatly in each of these countries. It is certain, however, that the Arabian Peninsula has changed greatly and if each respective regime does not evolve with the atmosphere of revolution, they will be in for a turbulent ride.

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