

BAHRAIN'S FIRST STEPS TOWARDS REFORM UNDER AMIR HAMAD

J E. PETERSON

Dr. J E. Peterson is a historian and political scientist specialising in the Arabian Peninsula and Gulf. He received his PhD from the Johns Hopkins University and has taught and worked at several academic institutions in the United States, including the Library of Congress. Until 1999, he served as the Historian of the Sultan's Armed Forces in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Security and Defence in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, and he spent 2000-2001 at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London. His books include: *Defending Arabia* (1986); *The Arab Gulf States: Steps Toward Political Participation* (1988); and *Defending Oman: A History of the Sultan's Armed Forces* (forthcoming). He is presently completing an Adelphi Paper on "Saudi Arabia and the Illusion of Security". His article on Saudi-American Relations after September 11 appeared in the February 2002 issue of *Asian Affairs*.

Succession in the Arab world has generated considerable concern in recent years. An underlying disquiet has been driven by the steady advance in the average age of Arab monarchs, the anomalous situation of hereditary rule in a world increasingly turning to democratisation, and the simultaneous promise and uncertainty raised by the prospect of generational change in leadership. Within the last few years, Morocco, Jordan, and Syria have witnessed successful leadership transitions. Even the Gulf—where attention is more often focused on the aging rulers of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates—has seen two new, younger rulers come to power: Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifah Al Thani in Qatar in 1995 and Shaykh Hamad bin `Isa Al Khalifah in Bahrain in 1999.* Both Hamads have taken bold steps that promise to transform the nature of politics in their small realms. But, so far, Shaykh Hamad of Bahrain has gone the farthest and promised the most.

Bahrain is the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member closest to the edge of fracture. In part, this is because of Bahrain's relative poverty: it has used up virtually all of its meagre oil reserves; it has a large population relative to its income; and much of the commercial prosperity once envisioned has escaped to Dubai. And, of course, economic factors are most often at the root of political grievances. But, in addition, the country exhibits the greatest magnitude of socio-political stratification in the GCC and there is a long history of dissidence and overt opposition precisely because of this factor. This was exhibited most recently in the

1994-1999 period but also occurred in 1921, 1938, 1953-1956, 1965, and, in a more limited context, in the early 1970s and the early 1980s. The last three years under a new ruler, however, offer more promise for an amelioration of long-standing differences than perhaps at any time during the preceding century.

Background

Bahrain has endured a long history of political tension, the consequence of the Gulf states' most pronounced extent of social stratification, a high degree of economic imbalance between the social strata, and the monopoly of political power by the top segment of the social ladder. The top stratum consists of the ruling Al Khalifah family and their Najdi tribal allies. The Al Khalifah are the only ruling family in the Gulf to have achieved their position by conquest: originally from Najd (central Arabia), the Al Khalifah invaded the islands of Bahrain in the late 18th century from neighbouring Qatar and wrested power from the Persians. They were helped by other Najdi tribes and more were welcomed to join the Al Khalifah over the course of the next century and a half.

Much of the economic wealth, although not the political power, of Bahrain traditionally has been held by the *hawwalah* merchant class. These families came to Bahrain from the Persian coast during the past several centuries but they claim to be Arab and Sunni, like the Najdis. The great majority of the population is formed by the al-Baharinah (singular, Bahrani), the indigenous Arab Shi`ah*. Traditionally cultivators and fishermen, the Baharinah may now comprise as much as 70% of the total population. The fourth stratum, at the bottom of the social and economic ladder, consists of Persian Shi`ah, most of whom came to work in Bahrain's nascent oil industry in the 1930s and 1940s.¹

The combination of political domination by the Al Khalifah and their Najdi allies and the economic deprivation of the Shi`ah produced the cyclical pattern of civil dissidence that marked much of the 20th century. The first half of the century witnessed a lack of cooperation between Sunni and Shi`ah dissidents as well as inter-communal strife. However, an alliance was forged during the 1953-1956 uprising, which held through the periods of 1965 and the mid-1970s.

Following the pattern established by Kuwait, Bahrain adopted a written constitution after independence in 1971 and established a National Assembly in 1973. But the more-or-less free elections produced a markedly independent membership, which alarmed many in the ruling Al Khalifah family. Given the climate of mutual suspicion between the government and opposition activists, the government introduced legislation through the assembly that would permit the government to arrest and detain political opponents for indefinite periods without trial. When the assembly refused to approve this draft law, the government suspended the assembly and enacted the law via amiri decree. Some of those subsequently arrested were ex-members of the assembly.²

There the situation remained for a quarter of a century. Discussions and public debate in 1979-1980 for restoration of the assembly came to naught. A petition in 1994 calling for restoration resulted in retribution against some of the signers and a petition presented to the Amir by Kuwaiti intellectuals and sympathizers the following year had no influence. In part, the government was reluctant to alter its stance because of the external climate. The 1979 revolution in Iran raised expectations and tension all along the Arab littoral and several arrests were made in Bahrain of Iranian-backed Shi'ah whom the government accused of planning a coup *d'etat*. The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) drove a wedge through Sunni-Shi'i solidarity and created Sunni suspicions of Shi'ah throughout the Gulf. The government finally created a *Majlis al-Shura* (consultative council) in 1993 with thirty appointed members, subsequently expanded to forty members. Most Bahrainis viewed this step as inadequate and even as insulting, given that Bahrain once had a totally elected, albeit short-lived, legislature.

As a consequence of the Iranian Revolution and especially the Iran-Iraq War, the cycle of opposition in Bahrain which came to the fore in the latter half of the 1990s did not spread beyond the Baharinah community and, due to the opposition's village-based and Iran-influenced religious leadership, may not have appealed to all al-Baharinah. Nevertheless, much of the population shared certain expressed goals of the opposition, including the expansion of employment opportunities for Bahrainis, an end to corruption in the government, and a restoration of the elected National Assembly. Moreover, the government seemed to treat the 1990s outbreak of violent opposition in much the same way it had earlier outbreaks: relying on intimidation and repression to keep a lid on the situation while waiting for the opposition to lose its steam.³

The situation changed with the death of Amir `Isa b. Salman in early 1999 and the accession of his son Hamad. Shaykh Hamad was born on 28 January 1950, was named Heir Apparent in 1964, and succeeded his father as Amir on 6 March 1999. He attended Sandhurst but did not finish the course. He subsequently passed out of the Mons Officer Cadet School in 1968 and returned home to become the first commander of the Bahrain Defence Force. He also did his staff training at the US Army Command and General Staff College in 1971 and qualified as a helicopter pilot in 1978. His appointment as Deputy President of the Al Khalifah Family Council in 1974 led him to establish the Historical Documents Center in his office in 1976. He also served as Minister of Defence until 1988 and is the founder of the Bahrain Equestrian and Horse Racing Association. He has three sons, Salman (born about 1970, appointed Heir Apparent on 9 March 1999), 'Abdullah (born about 1976), and Khalifah (born 1977), and two daughters. Most Bahrainis had not expected much change from Shaykh Hamad prior to his accession because of his unassuming posture, the dominant role of his uncle, Shaykh Khalifah b. Salman, as *de facto* ruler of the country, and perceptions of Shaykh Hamad as being under Saudi influence.⁴

The Promise of Recent Developments

In the first three years of his rule, the new Amir confounded his critics and raised the hopes of his subjects by pursuing a series of accelerating moves that promised to vastly improve the political situation in the island state. One of the first of these concerned Shaykh 'Abd al-Jamri the most prominent figure associated with the 1994-1999 opposition.⁵ On 7 July 1999 he was convicted of espionage and inciting unrest and sentenced to ten years in prison as well as partial liability for a 5.7 million Bahraini dinar fine as compensation for damages done during the uprising. But in a surprise announcement Shaykh 'Abd al-Amir was released the following day and sent home.⁶

Other developments soon followed. On National Day 1999 (16 December), Amir Hamad announced that municipal councils would be elected in the future (although no date was specified) and that women would be allowed to vote in them.⁷ On 3 July 2000, Ian Henderson, the British "retired" head of security, whose removal had been a key opposition demand, did retire from his post as adviser to the Ministry of the Interior and apparently left the country permanently.⁸ The Amir then appointed nineteen new members to the *Majlis al-Shura* on 27 September 2000. This step attracted considerable attention because the new appointees included four women (one of whom was Christian), a Jew, and a Bahraini of Indian origin, as well as for the promise that the *Majlis* would be converted to an elected body after about five years.⁹ Nineteen of the forty members of the body were Shi`ah. Around October 2000, Shaykh Hamad made a verbal promise of the coming of a new political era that would include a national dialogue over the constitution.¹⁰ At the same time, he had begun to draw a number of Bahraini intellectuals around him, presumably to seek support from the intelligentsia and to gather new ideas.¹¹

Matters quickened towards the end of 2000. An Amiri decree of 23 November 2000 appointed 46 members to a Supreme National Committee to prepare a draft charter that would spell out "the general framework of the future course of the state in the fields of national action and formulate the role of state institutions and their constitutional authority".¹² A few weeks later (10 December), six new members were added to the committee, apparently to replace an equal number who were said to have resigned in protest.¹³ In his National Day speech on 16 December, the Amir promised that he would gradually install an elected parliament, working closely with the appointed *Majlis al-Shura*, and to hold municipal elections, although he gave no time frame.¹⁴

The recommendations of the Supreme National Committee were made public on 14 December 2000 in the National Charter.¹⁵ The Charter sought to reaffirm the constitutional premise of the government and suggested certain amendments to the constitution. The aspects which generated the most attention were the suggestion that Bahrain become a constitutional monarchy (*mamlakah*), provisions for the independence of

the judiciary, and the introduction of an apparently bicameral legislative body with one elected house and one appointed house. In summary, the principal provisions of the charter are as follows:

- Chapter One sets out the social and legal responsibilities of the state and the people, including: (a) an emphasis on justice and the sovereignty of the law; (b) stipulations on how personal freedom and equality were to be guaranteed; (c) the freedom of religion; (d) the freedom of expression and publication; (e) the freedom of institutions of civil society; (f) protection for the family and the state's responsibility to care for those in need; (g) the right to work; and (h) the right to education and to academic freedom.
- Chapter Two defines the structure of the state. Bahrain is defined as a hereditary constitutional monarchy with the Amir as head of state and Supreme Commander of the armed forces. He appoints and dismisses the Prime Minister and the ministers. Bahrain's status as a constitutional monarchy means that: Islam is the religion of the state and Islamic jurisprudence is a principle for legislation; the people are the source of all powers; the democratic principle depends on the separation of power between the three branches (legislative, executive, and judiciary), but the Amir is the head of the three branches; the sovereignty of the law is the basis of rule and therefore the independence and the immunity of the judiciary are two essential warranties to protect rights and liberties; and the people, including both men and women, have the right to take part in public affairs, including voting and candidacy for office.
- Chapter Three defines the economic foundations of Bahrain: private property is guaranteed; economic justice is secured through legal adherence to contractual relations; the diversification of economic activities in Bahrain has promoted economic development and offered employment opportunities; Bahrain seeks to protect the environment and wildlife; public funds should be protected and the state must safeguard natural wealth and resources; and citizens should receive support for training in order to enhance their employment opportunities.
- Chapter Four details the responsibilities and requirements for national security. These include supporting the Bahrain Defence Force to allow it to carry out its mission, as well as the National Guard. The role of the Amir as the BDF's founder is emphasised.
- Chapter Five sketches the background to parliamentary activities, with emphasis on the role of the *Majlis al-Shura*. It asserts that many long-standing democracies have adopted a bicameral legislative system, with one council to represent the trends and thoughts of the people on contemporary issues, and the other to operate as a council for competent and experienced members.
- Chapter Six affirms Bahrain's commitment to the Gulf Cooperation Council and pledges to work for more coordination within the

GCC in such areas as economic complementarity, defence cooperation and information coordination, as well as for the improvement of GCC institutions for popular participation.

- Chapter Seven emphasises Bahrain's Arab identity, its membership in the Organisation of Islamic Conferences and the United Nations, and its belief in the peaceful settlement of disputes and international free trade.

At roughly the same time as the release of the charter Shaykh Hamad took measures to defuse the opposition. Shaykh Abd al-Amir al-Jamri, already on release from prison, had all restrictions on his movement and contacts removed on 24 January 2001.¹⁶ The Amir also had taken action to release all of the approximately one thousand political prisoners held in Bahrain. The first 65 prisoners were released to time with the Amir's National Day Speech on 16 December 2000.¹⁷ while the Minister of Cabinet Affairs and Information, Muhammad Ibrahim al-Mutawwi' said on 15 February, the second day of the referendum on the National Charter, that the last nineteen political prisoners in Bahrain had been released two days previously under an amnesty.¹⁸

The release of the text of the National Charter was accompanied by the holding of several public meetings to discuss its provisions and implications in the light of the government's announcement that the charter would be put to a vote in a national referendum. These mass meetings aroused great interest, with meeting places filled to capacity and hundreds turned away, and sparked a spirited debate, which soon spilled over into the press and private discussions. For the first time, the atmosphere in the country was open and talk of "democracy" was everywhere.¹⁹ The opposition initially urged the electorate, which included all Bahrainis, male and female, over the age of twenty, to vote 'no' but then reversed itself. Bahrainis went to the polls on 14 and 15 February 2001 to vote on the referendum. The government subsequently announced that 192,262 out of 217,000 eligible Bahrainis had voted, with 191,790-or 98.4%-casting "yes" votes.²⁰ The Heir Apparent, Shaykh Salman bin Hamad, was appointed to head the committee charged with implementing the charter.²¹

Other welcome measures were taken at the same time. The Prime Minister, Shaykh Khalifah bin Salman Al Khalifah, announced during a cabinet meeting on 18 February 2001 that the government would abandon the State Security Law, enacted just before the National Assembly was suspended in 1975, and abolish the State Security Court.²² This had been one of the opposition's key demands and both the draconian law, which permitted long periods of detention without formal charges, and the court, which lay outside the judiciary system, had prompted widespread criticism from abroad.

On 5 February 2001 the government also declared an amnesty for 108 dissidents exiled abroad and another 289 people who had been accused of security crimes.²³ Twenty or more exiles entered Bahrain in the next few days.²⁴ Two prominent exiles, Shaykh Abd al-Nabi 'Ali Qafud and

Shaykh `Isa Qasim, returned home to Bahrain on 8 March 2001 after seventeen and nine years of exile respectively, Shaykh Ali Salman (whose arrest in 1994 had triggered the unrest) returned on 19 March after six years in exile, and Sayyid Haydar al-Sitri returned the following day after being deported in 1995.²⁵ By April, nearly all exiles had returned. Mansur al-Jamri, the son of Shaykh Abd al-Amir al-Jamri and head of the Bahrain Freedom Movement in exile, returned for a visit in June and had his citizenship restored by the government in July.²⁶ Another step taken by the Amir was the granting of citizenship to many of the *bidun*, those people born in Bahrain but denied citizenship. The government announced on 20 February 2001 that citizenship would be granted to more than a thousand *bidun*.²⁷ A further 2090 were to receive citizenship according to a late 2001 announcement.²⁸

More changes were announced in early 2002. On 14 February Shaykh Hamad proclaimed himself King of Bahrain and announced that municipal elections would be held on 9 May and parliamentary elections on 24 October. Government officials also confirmed that a new appointed *Majlis al-Shura* would have equal legislative powers to the elected body but would hold 51% of combined votes (due to its president serving also as president of the overall body) moves that promptly provoked renewed objections from the opposition.²⁹ Although the elections would take place earlier than previously announced, the question of whether political parties would be allowed remained unanswered.

A Preliminary Assessment

Shaykh Hamad's recent steps are a welcome series of moves that are long overdue. They hold the real promise of reconciliation, of breaking a very long cycle of mistrust between the government and the people and between various sectors of the population-mistrust which has turned to opposition and which, in turn, has turned to violence. At the same time, the moves made so far are preliminary and may be characterized as essentially promises for future substantive changes. They may well be necessary first steps, but they tackle only one part of a major set of problems facing Bahrain today. The foundation of the Amir's promises lie within the National Charter and the legislative provisions of the charter have drawn the most attention. But the charter's pledge is unsatisfactorily vague. The relevant section reads:

[The bicameral] system is to be adopted in Bahrain. The first council shall be formed through direct and free elections and shall have legislative attributes. The second council shall be appointed and shall comprise people of experience and competence who will offer their advice and knowledge when needed. This balanced combination within the legislative branch possesses the distinctive feature of presenting advantages that offer a number of privileges, allowing popular participation in legislative affairs, and enabling interaction between the

various opinions and trends within a unified legislative council. The suggested formation of the legislative council which shall require a constitutional amendment, will allow it to derive wisdom and knowledge from one side, and the main orientations of the Bahraini voter from the other side. The amendment shall, without any doubt, lead to bolstering a democracy that works for construction, development, stability and prosperity, a democracy that strives for social peace and national unity.³⁰

Essentially the people of Bahrain were invited by their "yes" votes to give the government a blank cheque. The National Charter did not specify how the legislative body was to be constituted beyond the promise of the bicameral system. It did not say how elections would be held and it did not specify the role of the appointed house vis-a-vis the elected house. It did not say whether the legislature will have the right to review all government laws and policy. Consultative councils elsewhere in the Gulf have the right, on occasion exercised somewhat vigorously, to discuss draft legislation in the areas of the social service ministries but not in other fields—will this also be the case in Bahrain? Will the elected body have the right to introduce legislation, rather than simply comment on what the government has put before it? Most importantly, there remains the question of whether the King will retain the right to veto all measures passed by the body. Beyond that, it is seen by many Bahrainis as retrogressive: why should the citizenry settle for a bicameral system with an appointed house when the country had a fully elected National Assembly a quarter of a century ago?

The motivations behind the declaration in the National Charter that Bahrain would be a constitutional monarchy (*mamlakah*) and therefore the Amir would be a king (*malik*) are not clear. The only other kingdom in the Gulf is that of Saudi Arabia and initially there was some anticipation that Riyadh would object to the far smaller island state describing itself as a fellow kingdom. There was no Saudi reaction, however, which suggests that the Saudi powers knew of the decision in advance and did not object or at least acquiesced. This re-labelling may not actually have the significance that observers have attributed. Certainly the government of Bahrain sought to play it down. Some suggested that adoption of the title of king would set Shaykh Hamad above the rest of the family (i.e. proper reference to the ruler would be "His Majesty", whereas everyone else in the family would remain as "His Highness") and create more distance between him and his uncle the Prime Minister. Another suggestion is that Shaykh Hamad's example in these changes was King Husayn in Jordan and that modelling himself as a king as well was the next logical step.

More fundamentally, the National Charter only addresses one aspect of Bahrain's dilemma. Other serious problems must be tackled as soon as possible. First, there is a great problem of economic disparity between the wealthy in Bahrain and the majority of the population who do not share equally in the benefits of that wealth. In common with most of the other

GCC states, it is not just a question of the distribution of national income and resources in a social welfare context but of redistribution. This requirement has not been addressed anywhere in the Gulf, and certainly not in Bahrain where the need for redistribution is perhaps the greatest. In the year following the publication of the charter, demonstrations were held in al-Manamah's streets to protest the lack of jobs. These demonstrations were interlaced with others protesting Israel's occupation of West Bank towns and American support for Israel in early 2002.

Second, there is the imperative of economic diversification, the problem of population growth, and their impact on unemployment. This was one of the major causes of unrest in the 1990s, just as it was in previous periods. Bahrain is the poorest of the GCC states and therefore has the greatest need to diversify as quickly as possible. The problem is compounded by the fact that as Bahrain's population grows, so does its dependence on expatriate labour. This is a cause of considerable resentment due to the high rate of unemployment of Bahrainis.

Third, there is the problem of social stratification which is far more rigid in Bahrain than anywhere else in the Gulf. The ruling family and its Najdi tribal allies can be described almost as a caste: one has to be born into it. This stratum holds a monopoly of political power and demonstrates an increasing presence as an economic elite. More attention must be paid to sharing power, increasing political participation, and encouraging a more egalitarian society without negative emphasis on sectarian or community distinctions. The partial election of a parliamentary body addresses some grievances but the pattern of discrimination against the Shi'ah remains as serious as ever. Despite their overwhelming majority in the population, Shi'ah representation in the higher levels of government remains limited, they are systematically excluded from employment in the security forces, and job opportunities are scarce.

Some would argue that change must come slowly, partly to assuage powerful neighbour Saudi Arabia and partly to ensure internal stability. But times have changed for Saudi Arabia as well as its GCC allies. A *Majlis al-Shura* sits in Riyadh, an appointed consultative body represents all the GCC, and the Saudis have shown greater toleration of developments throughout the Gulf, including elections in Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman. Still, just possibly, a Bahraini crisis would leave fellow GCC members and Saudi Arabia in particular in a quandary over whether to intervene to save the ruling family. But is such a scenario likely? After all, it can also be argued that changes to the political *status quo* in Bahrain pose a far greater threat to those individuals and groups enjoying entrenched positions than they do to social cohesion. The system in Kuwait has not been threatened by an assertive elected parliament and Bahrainis have long regarded themselves at least as sophisticated as the Kuwaitis. In fact, the greater potential for fracture would seem to derive from the denial of real reforms, rather than the pace of actual reforms.

In short, sweeping and encouraging promises have been made, while the actual changes remain on the horizon. Most of the actions taken

by the Amir point to substantial changes and reforms in the foreseeable future. But few concrete steps have been taken yet and perhaps "the jury" assessing his true intentions and the likelihood of their accomplishment should still be considered "out." The key element in Shaykh Hamad's strategy must be the removal of his uncle, Shaykh Khalifah bin Salman, from his entrenched position as Prime Minister.

Shaykh Khalifah is widely believed to have enriched himself immeasurably from his position and his presence has long been the lightning rod for opposition. Certainly, the Amir's two attempts to construct new governments, on 31 May 1999 and on 17 April 2001, have not been encouraging. The first largely reaffirmed the incumbent membership in the Council of Ministers, which is to say a pro-Khalifah cabinet. The second only tinkered with the basic set-up. The Prime Minister's close adviser and Minister for Cabinet Affairs, Muhammad Ibrahim al-Mutawwi', was divested of his concurrent position as Minister of Information-but this post was given to Nabil al-Hamr, the editor of the conservative newspaper *al-Ayyam*. Less encouraging was promotion of the President of the University of Bahrain, an army officer appointed to put a stop to demonstrations at the university during the 1990s unrest, to the position of Minister of Education.

It could be argued that Shaykh Hamad needs time to exert his full authority over his state. Thus, the first government reshuffle in 1999 was essentially inconsequential and the second in 2001 was a sop (there are rumours of a further reshuffle later in 2002). The first phase of Shaykh Hamad's strategy necessarily has to be defusing the conditions of the unrest and gaining the trust of his people, thus creating personal legitimacy. Only once this has been secured can he enjoy the requisite strength to take over the full reins of government. It must be a slow process, as Shaykh Khalifah used thirty years in the job to create a government to serve his own interests and he has shown no signs of voluntary abdication. In addition, there are substantial elements within the Al Khalifah who fear that any changes represent concessions, and that concessions spell the beginning of the end.

NOTES

1. On the background to Bahraini society and politics, see, *inter alia*, Emile A. Nakhleh, *Bahrain. Political Development in a Modernizing Society* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books/D.C. Heath, 1976); M.G. Rumaihi, *Bahrain: Social and Political Change Since the First World War* (London: Bowker, 1976; in association with the Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies of the University of Durham); Fuad I. Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain: The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); May Seikaly, "Women and Social Change in Bahrain," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (August 1994), pp. 415-426; and Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States. Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989; rev ed.; Reading: Ithaca Press, 1998).

2. Background to these events is given in Nakhleh, *Bahrain*, Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain*, and J. E. Peterson, *The Arab Gulf States: Steps Toward Political Participation* (New York: Praeger, 1988; published with the Center for Strategic and International Studies; Washington Papers, No. 131).

3. On the 1994-1999 unrest, see Munira Fakhro, "The Uprising in Bahrain: An Assessment," in Gary G. Sick and Lawrence G. Potter, eds., *The Persian Gulf at the Millennium: Essays in Politics, Economy, Security, and Religion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), pp. 167-188, and Joe Stork, "Bahrain's Crisis Worsens," *Middle East Report*, No. 204 (July-September 1997), pp. 33-35.

4. Conjecture about the Saudi connection is based in part on his third (?) marriage to a Saudi woman and his rumoured business relations with Prince Muhammad bin Fahd, the Governor of the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia and a son of King Fahd. *Gulf Daily News* (Bahrain), 7 and 8 June 1983; Reuters, 6 March 1999; interviews in Bahrain between 1986 and 2001.

5. He had been arrested first in April 1995, released in September of that year, and re-arrested in January 1996 but put on trial only in February 1999.

6. *MidEast Mirror*, 7 July 1999.

7. Reuters, 16 December 1999.

8. *The Guardian* (London), 4 July 2000.

9. Reuters, 27 September 2000. Most comment on these appointments seemed to conclude that the minority members were included simply to curry favour with Western governments. Both the Jewish and the Indian-born members have close business ties to the Prime Minister. Interviews in Bahrain, January 2001.

10. Reuters, 23 November 2000.

11. *Gulf News* (Dubai), 26 December 2000, and interviews in Bahrain, January 2001.

12. Reuters, 23 November 2000. The committee was chaired by the Minister of Justice, Shaykh 'Abdullah b. Khalid Al Khalifah, and included six women. *Mideast Mirror*, 19 December 2000.

13. *Gulf News*, 11 December 2000. It was reported that they had resigned in protest against the proposal that Bahrain should become a kingdom. In response to the rumours of their resignation, the Minister of State for the Amiri Court, Shaykh Khalid b. Ahmad Al Khalifah told the press on 6 December that a monarchical system had existed in Bahrain since the constitution was adopted in 1973. *Gulf News*, 13 December 2000.

14. Reuters, 16 December 2000. He also pardoned 65 political prisoners and announced cheaper electricity rates and a bonus for government employees. *Ibid.*

15. Reuters, 14 December 2000. The English text of the National Charter was published in the *Bahrain Tribune*, 24 December 2001.

16. Reuters, 24 January 2001.

17. Reuters, 16 December 2000. The figure of 1,000 comes from a Reuters report of 12 February 2001. On 25 December 2000, the Amir issued a decree commuting the death sentences passed on three Shi'ah for a 1996 arson attack on a restaurant, which killed seven Bangladeshi workers. Another activist who killed a policeman in the same year had been executed already. Reuters, 26 December 2000. A number of prisoners had been released on the order of the Amir on religious and national holidays in 1999 and 2000, but it is not clear whether these releases included political prisoners.

18. Reuters, 15 February 2001. It is not clear whether most of these were drawn from the 16 Shi'ah activists jailed on security charges, who were given a special amnesty by an Amiri decree announced on 13 February. Reuters, 13 February 2001.

19. Observations and interviews in Bahrain, January 2001.

20. Reuters, 16 February 2001; AP, 17 February 2001.

21. *Economist*, 24 February 2001.

22. Reuters, 18 February 2001.

23. In addition to the 108 who had been exiled abroad, a Ministry of Interior statement said the amnesty covered another 289 people in the country, including: 75 detainees, 142 prisoners, and 72 people released on bail. Government statements said that all those who had asked for a pardon would benefit from the amnesty. Reuters, 5 February 2001 AP, 6 February 2001; *Independent* (London), 9 February 2001. Twenty Bahraini exiles were pardoned in November 1999 and at least 10 more by December of that year. Reuters, 3 November 1999; AP 15 December 1999.

24. *Independent* (London), 9 February 2001.

25. Reuters, 8, 19, and 20 March 2001.

26. Reuter, 24 July 2001.

27. Reuters, 1 March 2001. *Bidun* is an Arabic word meaning 'without.' Estimates of their number range from about 15,000, according to the government, to 30,000-50,000 by other Bahrainis. While a number of countries of origin are represented, the majority are *hawwalah* from the Iranian coast and Persian. Interviews in Bahrain, January 2001.

28. Reuters, 3 December 2001.

29. AP and Reuters, 14 February 2002. The existing *Majlis al- Shura* was dissolved two days later as part of the preparations for elections. Reuters, 16 February 2002.

30. Text of National Charter, as published in the *Bahrain Tribune*, 21 December 2001, and posted on the website of the Gulf 2000 Project.

*Note about transliteration: Shaikh—often written as Shaikh or Sheikh; Shi'ah—often written as Shi'a; King Husayn—popularly written as King Hussein. The spelling used in this article is according to academic practice and author's preferred spelling.

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2 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PJ, UK

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