

# **Arab Spring and the Resilience of Arab Monarchies: the Case of Bahrain**

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## **ABSTRACT**

It is generally acknowledged that Arab monarchies have been more resilient to regime change than the Arab republics in the Arab Spring context. I study Bahrain as a critical case of the Arab Spring. Thus, the resilience of Arab Gulf monarchies is usually explained through monarchical legitimacy, rentier state, and alliance building theories. In my thesis I have put to test the three theories and have found that the theory of monarchical legitimacy is the least plausible in terms of explaining the regime stability in Bahrain. This result is achieved through the analysis of opposition narratives which are divided into economic and political demands. Meanwhile, the other two theories maintain a stronger explanatory power.

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## INTRODUCTION

More than a year has passed since the beginning of political turmoil in the Arab Middle East, known as the Arab Spring. The region has seen the toppling of authoritarian regimes in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Yemen. Bloody street demonstrations erupted in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and clashes still continue in Syria as this thesis is being written. The outcome of events is unpredictable, and it is reasonable to engage in academic research as it creates space for understanding the essence of the latest developments.

The transformative magnitude of the Arab Spring has historic resemblance to the French Revolution of 1789 as far as its impact on Europe is concerned. Another historic comparison could be the ‘Spring of Nations’ of 1848 Revolutions across Europe. The revolutionary upheavals that are being observed in Arab countries have a similar impact on entire Middle East in the form of chain reaction. So far only the Arab republics of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya have faced a complete regime change. Amid ongoing political turmoil in the Middle East, the Gulf monarchies so far remain immune to regime change.<sup>1</sup> In this regard, Bahrain stands out as a deviant case: it is the only Gulf monarchy to have seen significant street protests since February 2011 and yet its monarchical regime type so far remains resilient. Hence in my thesis, I analyse Bahrain as a critical case of the Arab Spring. Critical case can usually “be defined as having strategic importance in relation to the general problem. If it is valid for this case, it is valid for all (or many) cases.”<sup>2</sup> I will use this critical case to test the empirical puzzle against the theories presented here. Thus, the stability of monarchical regime in Bahrain within the Arab Spring context would be an empirical puzzle

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<sup>1</sup> Morocco is the only monarchy where the reformist King enacted laws which increase the powers of the Moroccan parliament.

<sup>2</sup> Bent Flyvbjerg, “Case Study,” in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011), 307, <http://www.sbs.ox.ac.uk/centres/bt/directory/Documents/CaseStudy4%20HBQR11PRINT.pdf>.

of this thesis and is framed in the following way: *why has Bahrain's monarchical regime remained stable amid on-going political turmoil in other parts of the region?* To explain the resilience of monarchy in Bahrain I will test three theoretic approaches: cultural legitimacy/institutional statecraft, rentier state and alliance building.

It would be safe to assume that the initial framework for political activism in Bahrain was almost identical to that in Egypt or Tunisia – *the majority suppressed by political minority*. Bahrain also has a resemblance to other monarchies in the region. To explain the resilience of monarchy many scholars consider the institution of monarchy as being a strong explanatory variable. Bahrain is different from others as well. Among other things, Bahrain is not an Arab republic like Egypt, Tunisia, Libya or Syria where regime change revolutions took place.<sup>3</sup> Some others, like Sean Yom (2012), point to the fact that the ‘international assistance’ and the ‘rentier state’ factors better explain the critical case of Bahrain.<sup>4</sup> In the Bahraini context rentierism also retains strong explanatory power. Unlike in other oil producing Gulf Countries, Bahrain's share in oil production is rather small. It is largely known that Bahrain is not a major oil producer anymore and the rentier element of Bahrain's economy is mostly defined in terms of external aid which will be further discussed in chapter 3. Soon after the unrests erupted in February 2011, the King Salman Al-Khalifa has promised more job creation and overall increase in social expenditure. For example, the government presumably made concessions in the form of an ambitious social spending to offer each family \$2,600.<sup>5</sup> The lion's share of this financial aid come the so-called “Gulf Marshall Plan” initiated by the Gulf Cooperation Council as an economic aid to Bahrain and Oman. So the

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<sup>3</sup> Overall, there are numerous explanations of why the Arab monarchies have been immune to regime change revolutions unlike the Arab Republics. The key explanation of the endurance of Arab monarchies is centered on two important variables: external support and the institution of monarchy.

<sup>4</sup> Yom, Sean. “Understanding the Resilience of Monarchy During the Arab Spring.” Foreign Policy Research Institute, April 2012. <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/2012/201204.yom.monarchy-arab-spring.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Stephens, Michael. “Bahrain: At Risk of a Proxy Sectarian War?” Rusi, n.d. <http://www.rusi.org/analysis/commentary/ref:C4D7E494272218/>.

assumption is the benefits from external rents were essentially utilized in a strategy to subdue the growing social dissent thereby maintaining the stability of an existing regime.

The third explanatory variable is Bahrain's international alliance building pattern. In this theoretic approach I consider several factors: Bahrain's domestic sectarian division, its alliance relations with the United States, securitization of Iran and the Gulf Cooperation Council as a newly emerging coalition in the Gulf Region. When I test the theory of alliance building in the third chapter, I inherently link all of these factors. For example, given the fact that 70% of Bahrain's population belongs to the Shiite sect of Islam and the fact that the ruling dynasty there is Sunni minority, the grievances of the Shiite majority is a formidable task for the Al-Khalifa family. Hence, in the Arab Spring context, we should factor in the ethnic and sectarian composition of protesters in Bahrain. The majority Shiite population ruled by minority Sunni Al-Khalifa family is inherently in a hostile relationship with the latter. The most radical circles in the Shiite majority receive a spiritual and ideological blessing of Iranian Ayatollahs.

Thus, unlike other regime change revolutions, a regime change in favor of the Shiite majority in Bahrain leaves open the question of Iran's future involvement in Bahrain. The location of the U.S Fifth fleet in Bahrain is a factor that explains the rather silent reaction of the U.S to the unrest by Shiites. The farthest that the State Department's statements went was to reinforce the necessity of "national dialogue" instead of regime change.<sup>6</sup> And finally, Bahrain is at the choke point of the majority of the oil supplies from the Middle Eastern region. Disruptions of oil supply would entail price volatility in global commodity markets and, as a result of regional instability, would be much higher and much more serious than in the case with Libya.

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<sup>6</sup> "Clinton Criticises Bahrain over Protester Clashes." BBC, March 16, 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-12762500>.

This thesis will follow the following pattern: in the first chapter I will start by reviewing the existing literature related to this thesis. Further on, I will define the theoretical frameworks on regime stability in the Arab world. I will test my hypothesis based on the critical case of Bahrain against three theoretic approaches. In the second chapter, I will set the context for the critical case of Bahrain with the overview of historical and current political, economic and social issues. To explain the essence of the critical case, I will compare it with other countries in the region, mainly Arab republics some of which have seen the toppling of regimes. The third chapter will deal with the analysis of events in Bahrain from the perspective of three theories mentioned earlier. Here, I will test the theories against the critical case of Bahrain to identify whether they are plausible enough to explain the stability of monarchical regime in Bahrain.

## CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

The following chapter will review the existing literature that deals with rentier state, monarchical legitimacy and alliance building theories and will explore the key theoretical approaches which are utilized in this thesis to explain the critical case of Bahrain. To understand why the Arab monarchies, in particular Bahrain, have maintained regime stability against the background of regime change revolutions in Arab republics, it is necessary to have a look at three theoretical frameworks: rentier state, institutional statecraft of monarchy and the alliance building. This research begins with an empirical puzzle of the endurance of the Bahraini monarchical regime type amid the ongoing turmoil in the entire Middle East. In this thesis, I make an assumption that Bahrain is a critical case compared to other Arab revolts. Precisely speaking, the critical case is an illustration of how the necessity of regime stability comes into contradiction with the normative rhetoric of democracy promotion that dominates much of the discourse on the Arab Spring. In a pursuit to explain my research puzzle in this thesis, I carry out theory testing. As mentioned in the introduction part, the theories to be tested are rentier state, monarchical legitimacy and alliance building.

Monarchical institution is the first explanatory variable of the empirical puzzle in this thesis. This approach stems from *cultural legitimacy* and *institutional statecraft* considerations. Cultural legitimacy serves as a traditional power-base of a certain monarch. A monarch maintains religion and culture as essential elements of monarchical governance. Monarchs are mostly defined as “divine rulers”, and “in many cases, this has been very powerful because the monarch has been seen as a religious or divinely approved figure. This was true, for example, of the pharaohs who ruled ancient Egypt...” or “the emperors of

Japan were also worshipped as divine until 1945.”<sup>7</sup> History is replete with examples of such statehood, “The Byzantine Empire was a theocracy. The church defined the state, and the emperor – called basileus – was the supreme authority in both. The vision of a Christian empire gave legitimacy to the Byzantine monarchy...” argues Rebecca Steffof in her book.<sup>8</sup> In a more recent history, authors have raised serious questions over the political legitimacy and durability of monarchies. For example, consider Samuel Huntington’s argument about the obsolescence of monarchies in 20<sup>th</sup> century and named the cumulative challenges that they face as “king’s dilemma”:

He [monarch] could attempt to reduce or to end the role of monarchical authority and to promote movement toward a modern, constitutional monarchy in which authority was vested in the people, parties, and parliaments. Or a conscious effort might be made to combine monarchical and popular authority in the same political system. Or the monarchy could be maintained as the principal source of authority in the political system and efforts made to minimize the disruptive effects upon it of the broadening of political consciousness (p.177).<sup>9</sup>

The principal challenge faced by monarchs in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was how to liberalize without losing popular legitimacy. And yet, some of the monarchies such as Morocco, Bahrain and Jordan have managed both: to keep popular legitimacy under control and create political space for limited or selective liberalization. As far as the institution of monarchy is concerned within the Arab Spring context the essential question is: does the legitimacy of a monarch explain the exceptional stability of Arab Gulf Monarchies amidst falling authoritarian republics across the region? As Russel Lucas places this issue within the Arab Spring context:

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<sup>7</sup> Nathaniel Harris. “Divine Rulers.” In *(Systems of Government) Monarchy*, pp. 7–8. London: Evans Brothers Limited, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Steffof, Rebecca. “The Changing Roles of European Rulers.” In *Political Systems of the World: Monarchy*, 62. Tarrytown NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (Harvard University. Center for International Affairs: Yale University Press, 1968).

Before this year's [2011] events, it seemed that the traditional Arab monarchies were more nimble at democratization than frozen political systems of the republics and that it was increasingly presidents rather than monarchs who faced the 'king's dilemma' of how to democratize without losing control altogether.<sup>10</sup>

Russel further contends that Arab monarchies have performed better 'at democratization than have republics – no king, emir, or sultan has stood for election – but some have been better at liberalization.'<sup>11</sup> In other words, there is less fear for Arab monarchs to engage in certain reforms or have parliamentary elections which is invariably linked to a very low possibility that a particular monarch would be replaced by someone else. Precisely speaking, the mere existence of elections, be it parliamentary or municipal, would not undermine the absolute power of a monarch who can be considered legitimate on the basis of the constitution.

Another element of the monarchical legitimacy is personal power of a monarch who can rule with the so-called "authoritarian statecraft" mechanism. Yom defines this mode of governance as 'strategies of institutional manipulation and opposition management.' Thus, monarchical leaders tend to excel better at statecraft than their republican colleagues since king's authority to sack any official can be legitimized by the constitution of monarchy. Therefore, monarchs may appoint or sack certain ministers performing not well enough and by this they would simply be 'scape-goating appointed political servants, including members of their own families.' He finalizes his point by arguing that '... buffered by elite retainers and shielded by bureaucratic institutions, monarchs are seldom exposed to social opposition in the way that commoner presidents are.' The *statecraft argument* is reinforced by others such as Saud Al-Otaibi from the King Abdulaziz University. By dismissing the intervention, cultural and functional arguments, he proposes the alternative explanation which essentially

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<sup>10</sup> Russel E. Lucas. 2011. "Is the King's Dilemma Only for Presidents?" Sada. <http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/04/06/is-king-s-dilemma-only-for-presidents/6bpf>.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

highlights the monarchical legitimacy through institutional statecraft.<sup>12</sup> He carries out the case study of Saudi Arabia based on the assumption that the Saudi monarchy has been the most durable so far and, secondly due to the fact that the Al-Saud monarchy shares cultural and historic affinity with the other three dynasties existing in the Arabian Peninsula between 1902 and 1929. He emphasizes the importance of charismatic leadership, coercion strategy and administrative control strategy as key elements to back up his institutional statecraft argument. This argument was also challenged by Yom who made a historic reference to earlier Arab monarchies of Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Algeria who had collapsed by the end of the 1970s. Here, the *institutional statecraft* argument reveals certain weaknesses. It is debatable to what extent the statecraft argument has a strong explanatory power if institutionally well-managed monarchies experienced failures of regime stability.

The cultural arguments are also dismissed by Lisa Anderson. She factors into her analysis cultural determinism and regional exceptionalism in the Middle East and renders the cultural explanations unsatisfactory on two grounds:

First, monarchy as currently understood in the Middle East is no more indigenous than liberal democracy. Second, even if it were a traditional regime type, its alleged historical authenticity fails to explain the apparent ability of Modern Eastern monarchs to accommodate and even foster nontraditional – not to say modern – social and political change.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, historically the occurrence of monarchy in the Middle East should be attributed to the logic of the Great Power imperial policy: ‘that is to say, the monarchies of the region were initially instruments of the European imperial policy.’ Thus, the historic reference by Anderson presents most of the institutional legitimacy explanations rather weak.

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<sup>12</sup> Saud M. Al-Otaibi. 1998. “The Resilience of Monarchy in the Middle East Reconsidered: A Case Study of Saudi Arabia.” *Journal of King Abdulaziz University* 10 (2): 69–80.

<sup>13</sup> Lisa Anderson. 1991. “Absolutism and the Resilience of Monarchy in the Middle East.” *Political Science Quarterly* 106 (1): 1–15.

Institutional or authoritarian statecraft in the context of monarchies can be defined as an outcome of monarchical legitimacy. It essentially refers to strategies of cooptation of elites and the accommodation of religious groups into public realm. Moreover, monarchs can safely launch even constitutional reforms which create the visibility of democratic governance. However, those reforms essentially do not challenge the fundamental paradigm of monarchical governance as the key executive powers would still be vested in a monarch. Examples of such monarchies are Morocco and Jordan. Where does this leave us in connection with the main research puzzle? Can monarchical institution argument explain the resilience of monarchy in the critical case of Bahrain? This theory will be tested in chapter 3 of this thesis.

The second explanatory variable of regime stability used in this thesis is rentier state theory. A commonly accepted definition of a classical rentier state was set by Hossein Mahdavy. He defines rentier states as “countries that receive on a regular basis substantial amounts of external rent.”<sup>14</sup> Other scholars of rentier state theory, Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani, highlight the oil factor in their analysis:

“the purpose of an attempt to define a rentier state is not to reach an abstract notion of such a state but to help elucidate the impact of recent economic developments, in particular the oil phenomenon, on the nature of the state in the Arab region.”<sup>15</sup>

Since I am analyzing the critical case of Bahrain in my research, for the methodological purposes of this thesis I will operate with the notion of an *external rent* which is substantially addressed by Beblawi and Luciani:

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<sup>14</sup> Cook, M., ed. “The Patterns and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: The Case of Iran.” In *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East: From the Rise of Islam ...*, p.428. School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London 1970: Routledge Taylor&Francis Group, 1970.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

“the externality of the rent origin is crucial to the concept of a rentier economy. The existence of an internal rent, even substantial, is not sufficient to characterize a *rentier economy*, though it could indicate the existence of a strong *rentier class* or group.”<sup>16</sup>

They point to the fact that the existence of merely internal rent does not explain the true nature of a particular rentier state. Hence they further reinforce the importance of an external factor in rent-seeking, “an external rent on the other hand, can, if substantial, sustain the economy without a strong productive domestic sector, hence the epithet of a rentier economy.”<sup>17</sup> Michael Ross furthers this debate by combining external factors and accountability of authorities:

Theories of rentier state contend that when governments gain most of their revenues from external sources, such as resource rents or foreign assistance, they are freed from the need to levy domestic taxes and become less accountable to the societies they govern.<sup>18</sup>

Shambayati notes the “social class” aspect of a rentier economy when discussing the civil society-government issues:

“The dependence of the entrepreneurial classes on external rents also minimizes the potential for class conflict. The underdevelopment of productive economic sectors and the ability of the economic elite to enrich itself through rent seeking eliminate the need for economic exploitation of the domestic population. As a result, social stratification is impeded, and class cannot be the main organizational base of challenges to the state.”<sup>19</sup>

As seen from the literature, much of it defines the rentier state as an entity receiving most of its revenues in the form of external rents. In Middle Eastern context, the general assumption is that most of the rents come from oil extraction and production. This argument is backed by

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<sup>16</sup> Hazem Beblawi, Giacomo Luciani, *The Rentier State* (Croom Helm Australia: Istituto Affari Internazionali, 1987).p. 51

<sup>17</sup> Michael Ross, “The Political Economy of Resource Curse,” *World Politics* 51 (January 1999): 312–313.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Hootan Shambayati, “The Rentier State, Interest Groups, and the Paradox of Autonomy: State and Business in Turkey and Iran,” *Comparative Politics* 26, no. 3 (April 1994): 309.

Yom who discusses this issue in the Arab Spring context. Thus, Yom defines the nature of external rent in geopolitical and economic terms. He maintains that ‘In the current era, external factors in the form of geopolitical support and oil wealth have played a more tangible role in insulating royal leaders from internal pressures.’<sup>20</sup> Thus, in his analysis, external support and oil are the most important factors explaining the durability of Arab monarchies. In the Middle Eastern context and specifically in the Persian Gulf, external rents would essentially mean substantial revenues from oil export and from transit fees of oil. Many of the Gulf countries, the majority of which are Arab monarchies, can be considered to be states with largely rentier type of economies. Revenues from oil exports and from related transactions constitute a large share of state budget. Moreover, these revenues in many cases provide an autocratic regime with necessary means to stave off any emerging social unrest. However, the literature available lacks analysis on rentier states which experience a diminishing oil production and hence challenge the classic assumptions of a rentier state theory. In this case Mahdavy’s general definition of a rentier state getting “external help” comes close to defining those cases where oil does not play a significant role in a state’s rentier economy. Moreover, the available literature does not address the critical issue of regime stability and rentier theory which the current thesis seeks to identify. This is especially true in the case of Bahrain.

Specifically speaking of Bahrain, the monarchical regime there has developed mechanisms by which it would offer reasonable financial aid to communities in areas of massive social unrest. In other words, monarchs use external rents to buy off domestic social discontent. In this thesis I argue that they (monarchs) essentially seek to implement preventive measures against rising social discontent from developing into a dangerous trend. These would be the

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<sup>20</sup> Yom, Sean. “Understanding the Resilience of Monarchy During the Arab Spring.” Foreign Policy Research Institute, April 2012. <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/2012/201204.yom.monarchy-arab-spring.pdf>.

plausible explanations of a rentier state and the theory testing of rentierism will be carried out in chapter 3.

The third explanatory variable of the research puzzle is alliance building. This theoretical approach considers the external politico-military assistance or alliance to be a crucial factor for regime stability in the Arab monarchies of the Gulf Region. The pattern of alliance building is best defined by structural neorealist theory. Alliance-building by a certain state is a reaction to the growing threat posed by another regional hegemon. This can take two forms: states can either bandwagon with the source of threat or balance with another hegemon against the source of threat. Stephen Walt argues that the international behavior of a certain state in an anarchical system is contingent on whether states choose to confront major source of threat or they choose to appease it. In reference to the Middle East he contends, “The history of superpower alliances in the Middle East strongly supports the proposition that these states act primarily to balance one another.”<sup>21</sup>

This argument can be interpreted in a following way that although in a bi-polar world the primary mode of confrontation was perceived to be between the USA and the Soviet Union, externally induced alliance formation led to an ever-increasing challenge of intra-regional balancing as well. Now that the Cold War is over, the pattern of superpower rivalry is not sufficient and probably irrelevant to the realities present-day Middle East.

In the post-Cold War period the pattern of strategic behavior for Arab monarchies of the Gulf Region, and particularly for Bahrain, is that of containing the threat emanating from Iran. Bahrain’s threat perception of Iran is inherently linked to domestic stability in the former. Thus, if Iran can effectively influence Bahrain’s Shia population thereby fuelling anti-government protests, Bahrain’s alliance relations with the GCC and the United States prove to be mechanisms of threat containment from Iran and subsequently regime stability in

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<sup>21</sup> Walt, Stephen. *The Origins of Alliances*. New York: Cornell University, 1987.p. 153

Bahrain.<sup>22</sup> The available literature on alliance building provides a strong and plausible explanation for regime stability in the Middle East.

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<sup>22</sup> GCC stands for Gulf Cooperation Council

## **CHAPTER TWO: HISTORIC OVERVIEW OF BAHRAIN AND THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT LEADING TO THE ARAB SPRING**

In this chapter I will set the context for the critical case of Bahrain with a brief overview of the emergence and evolution of the Bahraini monarchy. Then this chapter will place Bahrain in the comparative framework with other Gulf Countries, namely Arab republics. The purpose of the chapter is to provide a critical analysis of key historic events and identify how they relate to present-day realities of Bahrain.

### ***2.1 Historic Background***

The emergence of the Al-Khalifa family as a ruling elite dates back to 1783. Between 1783 and 1971 Bahrain remained under the British protectorate. The British imperial rule over Bahrain was strongly supportive of the monarchical type of governance. From this perspective, the institution of monarchy historically served the interests of the British Empire not only in Bahrain but also in the entire Gulf Region. By all accounts, the monarchical regime type in Bahrain established itself around the time when the anti-royalist revolutions were transforming the Western nation-states. The major imperial power in the Gulf Region was Britain which by the time of the French Revolution had remained a solid constitutional monarchy. The legitimate endurance of monarchy in Britain largely explains the long-standing resilience of monarchical regime type in the Gulf region and particularly in Bahrain. By contrast, the imperial protectorate regimes in Algeria and Tunisia were established by the French. The domestic political transformations in France to a great extent influenced the governance modes in its protectorate territories of North Africa and Eastern Mediterranean. As a result, the majority of France's former Middle East colonies now have republican

regime types while most of the monarchies in the Gulf Region are former British protectorates.<sup>23</sup>

In 1971 Bahrain became an independent state and was established as a constitutional monarchy. Although adopted in 1971, the first constitution did not last more than five years and in 1975 it was abolished by the emir Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa. In the period between 1975 and 2002 the Bahraini monarchical authorities enacted emergency laws to institute an enduring and a legitimate powerbase in Bahrain. For a long time under the regime of emergency laws the Shia majority remained the most suppressed segment of the Bahraini society. The growing marginalization led to the formation of opposition movements which sought to make their voice heard through legitimate means of political struggle. Thus, the Shia opposition movement became increasingly active back in the 1980s and 1990s. The representatives from the Shia community articulated their grievances in the form of street protests. The agents of protests were different in nature: both secular and religious. As Louay Bahry notes, “Street demonstrations by the Shiites were a common phenomenon during the 1980s, with Shiites asking mainly for two things; jobs and constitutional reforms.”<sup>24</sup> The most massive phase of anti-government protests took place between 1994 and 1996. Within two years “this expanded agenda has contributed to the development of a specific Shiite identity.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, the sectarian identity of Shias in Bahrain was essentially shaped by their opposition to the ruling Sunni elite.

In 1999 Hamad ibn Isa Al Khalifa received the throne after the death of his father. The domestic political landscape of 2000s was largely set with the initiation of a number of

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<sup>23</sup> For example, Syria and Lebanon are former French protectorates. Now they both have republican regime types. Meanwhile, Jordan and most of the Gulf Kingdoms (except for Saudi Arabia) are former British protectorates. An exception to this trend is Morocco, still a monarchy but former French protectorate.

<sup>24</sup> Bahry, Louay. “The Socioeconomic Foundations of the Shiite Opposition in Bahrain.” *Mediterranean Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (2000): 129–143.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* p. 131

reforms by King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa. The new King instituted popular elections and a new constitution was adopted in 2002.<sup>26</sup> This was the beginning of a new era of political reforms in Bahrain. Political competition and civic activism throughout the 2000s significantly increased. In 2002, 2006, and 2010 several parliamentary and national/municipal elections were held.<sup>27</sup> Having boycotted the 2002 elections, the Shia political societies ran for the 2006 and 2010 elections. As of 2010, the Shiites increased their seats in the Council of Representatives from 17 in 2006 to 18 in 2010 whereas the sectarian composition of the Upper House (Shura Council) was evenly distributed between Sunnis and Shias with each winning 19 seats.<sup>28</sup> The new Constitution also established the elected Council of Representatives and the so-called *Shura* (Consultative) Council. According to the new constitution, the King is authorized to make “all cabinet appointments and thus exercises the direct rule.”<sup>29</sup> The 2002 Constitution stipulates the legitimate grounds for the King’s rule:

- a. The King is Head of State, and its nominal representative, and his person is inviolate. He is the loyal protector of the religion and the homeland, and the symbol of national unity.
- b. The King safeguards the legitimacy of the government and the supremacy of the constitution and the law, and cares for the rights and freedoms of individuals and organisations.
- c. The King exercises his powers directly and through his Ministers. Ministers are jointly answerable to him for general government policy, and each Minister is answerable for the business of his Ministry.

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<sup>26</sup> 1) The official name of the monarch was now King, not Emir anymore. 2) In 2002 a referendum was held on a new “National Action Charter” as well as the new Constitution. 3) The major resentment of the Shia political factions was about the equal size (40 seats each) of the Council of Representatives and the Shura. It would effectively mean the impossibility of majority veto voting.

<sup>27</sup> According to Bahraini Law, all the political parties are banned as such. Instead there are only political factions or societies participating in elections. However, many commentators refer to, for instance, the opposition movement Al-Wifaq as a party.

<sup>28</sup> Katzman, Kenneth. Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy. CRS Report for Congress. Washington DC, USA: Congressional Research Service, May 14, 2012. p. 6, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/95-1013.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*

d. The King appoints and dismisses the Prime Minister by Royal Order, and appoints and dismisses Ministers by Royal Decree as proposed by the Prime Minister.<sup>30</sup>

The constitution of Bahrain provides us with a contextual understanding of the legitimacy of King's rule: he is the ultimate protector of the rights and freedoms of Bahrain's populace and his power is considered inviolate. With this dual nature of King's legitimacy, the Bahraini monarchy has embarked on substantial political reform since the beginning of the 2000s. The institutionalization of parliamentary elections and a new constitution are examples of how the monarchical regime has sought to legitimize itself in the eyes of its populace. These historic events have paved a way for the opening of political space in Bahrain and have contributed to formation of civil society. Bahrain's historic period of the 2000s is important for many reasons, but most of all, it helps one understand the nature of political and economic demands that set the context for the Arab Spring. In a way, the visible liberalization of Bahrain is a function of top-down and bottom-up movements. I attribute the essence of events in Bahrain as an evolution of domestic political processes that started in 2000s and earlier in the 1990s.

## ***2.2 The Sunni-Shia Relationship***

In historic perspective the Sunni-Shia relationship deserves a special place. The Safavid Shias started to rule in Bahrain in 1602 and their domination continued until 1717. As Juan Cole notes the Iran's intellectual and spiritual influence on Bahrain was stronger strategic control:

The Safavids faced the problem of ruling a relatively distant island, bordering the Ottomans, and warding off Portuguese attacks. As they did within 16<sup>th</sup> century Iran, they met this strategic and logistical problem, in part, with an ideological solution.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> "The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain", February 14, 2002.  
[http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/ba00000\\_.html](http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/ba00000_.html).

<sup>31</sup> Juan Ricardo Cole, *Sacred Space And Holy War: The Politics, Culture and History of Shi'ite Islam* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2005)., p. 44

The Arab Spring has shown that the Iranian influence on Bahrain's Shias is huge and it has a long history. In the 29<sup>th</sup> century Iran's special treatment of Bahrain was exemplified in the way Bahrain Iran showed reluctance to recognize Bahrain as an independent state. Moreover, after the Islamic revolution, Iran has attempted to export the ideology of a Shia Muslim state to Bahrain. Iran's clandestine goal seems to be obvious: to revise the 1970 agreements which recognize Bahrain as an independent state and to reanimate the idea of merging the kingdom to its territory. This is how, as the Iranian rhetoric puts it, the historic justice will be reestablished. Other than that, Iran is inspired by the example of what happened in Iraq where the Shias now are in government. The Bahraini example can be contagious for other Arab monarchies and in fact the GCC troops can be regarded not as forces stabilizing Bahrain, but protecting and projecting Sunnism in the Gulf Region. Thus, in comparison to an inter-tribal civil war in Libya or anti-Mubarak protests in Egypt the Sunni-Shia conflict in Bahrain would potentially involve two competing regional powers. Given the fact that the Fifth U.S. Fleet is stationed in southern Bahrain, it is safe to assume that Bahrain's dependence on external help will remain the same if not increase. By avoiding a direct military confrontation with the U.S.-backed Bahrain, Iran will seek to use the Shia Fifth Column and thereby destabilize Bahrain from within.

Moreover, Iran's involvement in domestic affairs of Bahrain is inherently linked to the status and treatment of Bahraini Shias. The structure of the relationship between the Sunnis and Shias has utmost importance for understanding the historic roots of domestic power-sharing and the challenges that the both communities have faced. Nowadays, the sectarian composition of Bahrain is unique for the entire Gulf Region. It is the only monarchy with the majority Shia population ruled by the minority Sunni Al-Khalifa family. The overall

Muslim population of Bahrain is 81%.<sup>32</sup> Shia Bahrainis constitute about 70% out of it.<sup>33</sup> And yet, they have the least political representation in Bahrain. Their presence is almost non-existent in the security forces and usually they are not hired for the critical high-ranking positions. Shiites believe that they hold the most legitimate claim for their political representation in Bahrain based on two grounds: first, historically the Shias had inhabited this area before the Arab Al-Khalifa tribes arrived. Secondly, the population-wise the Shias are in majority. The recent findings of the investigative journalist Malinowski suggest that, “Much of Bahrain’s police force consists of Sunni foreigners, recruited from countries like Syria, Pakistan, and Yemen” and in light of the latest demonstrations “some [Sunni foreigners] may also be transposing their homegrown prejudices onto Bahrain’s struggle.”<sup>34</sup> In doing so, as some Shias argue, the government seeks to change the sectarian composition in Bahrain in favor of Sunnis which would presumably guarantee a strong and legitimate powerbase for the ruling Al-Khalifa family. This is not to make a hastened conclusion that since the majority in Bahrain belongs to the Shia sect of Islam, they must be Persian. In fact, the pre-Al-Khalifa ethnic composition of the Shia population was predominantly Arab with a few Persian speaking communities within it. This is the case now. And yet, the overarching sense of unity as an opposition against the Sunni Arabs was rooted in the fact that the indigenous Arabs and Persians belonged to the Shia sect of Islam.

### ***2.3 Current Socio-Economic Context***

Unlike in other Gulf monarchies, the geological Gods have not endowed Bahrain with immense hydrocarbon reserves. Bahrain has been operating its oil fields since 1934 and

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<sup>32</sup> “Bahrain.” Cia World Factbook, n.d. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ba.html>.

<sup>33</sup> For the last sixty years the growing imbalance of population has changed in favor of Shias. If “In the early 1950s, the Sunni and Shia populations were almost evenly divided, with a slight Shiite majority”, in the beginning of 2000s the Shias constituted the overwhelming majority.

<sup>34</sup> MALINOWSKI, TOM. “Prison Island.” Foreign Policy, May 7, 2012. [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/05/07/prison\\_island](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/05/07/prison_island).

currently Bahrain's oil and gas reserves are estimated at 210 million barrels of oil and 5.3 trillion cubic meters of gas.<sup>35 36</sup> According to the most optimist estimates, Bahrain will run out of oil reserves in 10 or 15 years. It is indicative that the process of political liberalization in Bahrain started simultaneously with a decline of oil production in early 2000s. "Oil production in Bahrain has been stagnant over the last six years, averaging about 50,000 – 67,000 bdp, while consumption has increased by almost 46% since 2002" is said in the report of the *Oil and Gas Directory* for 2011.<sup>37</sup> The prospects for future natural gas reserves are not promising either. The same report claims that with the current rate of consumption, Bahrain's gas reserves will most probably deplete in a decade. Currently, Bahrain explores the joint Abu Saafa oil field with Saudi Arabia.

Despite its remaining dependence on external rent, Bahrain has attempted to diversify its economy as well. While analyzing Bahrain's capacity for diversification, Birks and Sinclair back in 1979 concluded:

In any case, whatever path is followed in preparing for an oil-less future, Bahrain might be setting an example that other oil-exporting states find it impossible to follow. Despite their stronger financial base they have neither the flexibility in terms of human resources, nor the advantage of being the first to diversify their economies”<sup>38</sup>

Thus, they made a prediction which holds true nowadays: Bahrain has managed to diversify its economy and thanks to an increasing number of qualified guest workers it has heavily invested in financial sector. In short, the field of financial services is now considered to be the

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<sup>35</sup> Katzman, Kenneth. Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy. CRS Report for Congress. Washington DC, USA: Congressional Research Service, May 14, 2012. P. 30, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/95-1013.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> Bahrain is the only oil exporting Gulf Monarchy not a member of the OPEC.

<sup>37</sup> Kingdom of Bahrain. *Oil and Gas Directory Middle East*, 2011.  
<http://www.oilandgasdirectory.com/research/Bahrain.pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> J.S. Birks and C.A. Sinclair, "Bulletin:(British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)" 6, no. 1 (1979): 48.

major non-oil sector in Bahrain, where Bahrain is facing increasing competition by regional giants such the UAE and Qatar.

A developing non-oil sector notwithstanding, unemployment remains as one of the most pressing issues of the present-day Bahrain. Although the official figures tend not to set a clear distinction in the sectarian division of the unemployed, the majority of them are Shias with the overall unemployment being around 20%.<sup>39</sup> The non-oil sector has not been inclusive in terms of job creation for all the segments of society. The underlying reason for the unemployment of the large segment of the Shia population is two-fold: Shias are more frequently discriminated and the lack of appropriate skills for financial services sector which requires highly qualified international workforce and Bahrain has to import them. Consequently, the increasing number of worker migrants from other countries has contributed to the already existing grievances of the local Shia population. If undereducated Shias lack necessary skills and qualification for financial serves sector, then the long-term ambitious job creation programs cannot be an immediate solution. Under these conditions, the most effective means remains the increase of social welfare payments so that to buy off the discontent. Stemming from this factor is the necessity of receiving external rent. It leads me to assume that the development of non-oil sector in the Bahraini case cannot account for a higher level of employment among the Shia population. In the absence of real employment opportunity, the probability of social unrest increases as well. This is not to claim that there is no single Shiite Bahraini in a governmental position or business. Those who are loyal to the Al-Khalifa family have a vested interest in the endurance of the regime and this can be considered as a rent for loyal Shias. “However”, as Faramazi argues, “...Shiites are almost never allowed employment in sectors like defense, police, state TV and radio, or the

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<sup>39</sup> “CIA Bahrain.” Central Intelligence Agency, May 3, 2012. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ba.html>.

information ministry, though there's no law barring them.”<sup>40</sup> However, many Shias accuse the authorities of creating favorable conditions for Sunnis from neighboring or other Muslim countries to come and settle in Bahrain as workforce. The presence of Sunni expat Muslims is most striking in security forces. In reference to Syrian expats, Mansur al-Jamri contends that “such a large number of families implies 40,000 to 50,000 additional population, or about 13 percent of the native population. There is no doubt that many Syrian Bedouins can be seen in Bahrain now, and most of them are working for the security forces.”<sup>41</sup> The Sunni Syrians were recruited for the security forces and during the Arab Spring unrest their brutal attitude towards the Shias of Bahrain was fuelled by the situation in Syria where the Alawite Shias rule over the majority Sunni population.<sup>42</sup>

The promises of more job creation announced by the Bahraini government can be realized only in the long-term perspective. The most essential short-term priority has been to stave off the unrest per se through external rent. Thus, while “the Arab world's hydrocarbon heavyweights drastically expanded their welfare entitlements and development expenditures in an effort to head off social protest” this has not been the case in Bahrain.<sup>43</sup> Lacking financial means of its own, and unable to create jobs in the short-term perspective, Bahrain agreed to the GCC-initiated “Gulf Marshall Plan.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Scheherzade, Faramarzi. “Clampdown in Bahrain.” *The Nation* (September 12, 2011): 41–42.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Jamri, Mansoor. “State and Civil Society in Bahrain.” 7. Chicago, IL., USA, 1998.

<sup>42</sup> The situation in the Syrian Arab Republic has many resemblances to that of Bahrain. Thus, historically the ruling elite in Syria have always been the Sunni dynasties. However, after Syria got independence in 1971, power struggle shifted in favor of Shia Alawites who are in minority. The ruling Asad family belongs to this sect. Since Syria has a republican type of regime, his legitimacy is based on elections and the dilemma that the president faces in view of the popular elections could mean the loss of real power. For more info See: [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/05/07/prison\\_island](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/05/07/prison_island)

<sup>43</sup> Yom, Sean. “Understanding the Resilience of Monarchy During the Arab Spring.” Foreign Policy Research Institute, April 2012. <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/2012/201204.yom.monarchy-arab-spring.pdf>.

<sup>44</sup> This generous financial package in the amount of \$ 10 billion is often referred to as “Gulf Marshall Plan”.

## ***2.4 Bahrain and the Arab Spring***

When analyzing Bahrain and the Arab Spring, it is important to make a distinction between an immediate factor and a structural factor leading the uprising. The immediate factor was the impact of other Arab revolutions which had started earlier in 2011. The structural factors are the fundamental grievances of Bahrainis which have shaped their cause for the uprising. Just like in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, the “Arab Spring” erupted in Bahrain during the winter of 2011. The situation in Bahrain had similarities with and differences from what was going on in other Arab states. All of the above countries have republican regime type while Bahrain is a monarchy. Moreover, Bahrain is relatively more vulnerable than others due to its strategic position in the Gulf Region. Unlike other Gulf monarchies, Shias in Bahrain are the majority but politically the least represented group.

The protests against the reaction of the Bahraini government were growing since mid-February 2011. The majority of protesters were Shias. In mid-February, after violent clashes on the streets between demonstrators and security forces, the authorities declared a national dialogue and released most of the detained protesters. However, the opposition protests were still taking place even after the announcement of a national dialogue. The Crown Prince following the request of the King went on air and made a reasonable address to opposition. However, the leaders of the Al-Wefaq Shiite movement did not accept those offers. This significantly damaged the reputation of the King who has positioned himself as a reformer for the last 10 years of his power. The deadline set by the opposition was unacceptable for the ruling family either.<sup>45</sup> Obviously, this has more to do with the lack of political culture and the tendency to react to political opponents in a radical way.

Meanwhile, the Al-Wefaq leadership made it fairly clear that if the opposition and the authorities fail to achieve any viable solution to the political deadlock, then the situation risks

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<sup>45</sup> The deadline set by the opposition basically presupposed the soonest resignation of the government.

to get out of control. This was, in a sense, an alarming message to Saudi Arabian authorities who may rightly expect the instability in Bahrain to have a contagious effect onto the Shia-populated areas of Eastern Saudi Arabia.<sup>46</sup> The solidarity between the Saudi and Bahraini monarchies is strong and the GCC military involvement in Bahrain is explained by this factor. If the Bahraini royal family has a strong affiliation with the Saudi monarchy, the Shias of Bahrain get their spiritual support from Iran. The conditions under which the Shias of Bahrain live induce Iran to position itself as a defender of their interests and to view the Bahraini Shias as a “Fifth Column”. In a way, the Shia-Sunni confrontation in Bahrain could be seen as a “micro-reflection” of a larger regional confrontation of Saudi Arabia and Iran. Thus on March 13 the GCC forces headed by Saudi Arabia entered Bahrain with the purpose of assisting the Bahraini authorities to stabilize the domestic situation. On March 15 the Bahraini government declared a three-month state of emergency. The apologies by the authorities followed with regard to the murder of several demonstrators but they did not satisfy broader political demands of the Shiite opposition. Indeed, the demands of the Shiite opposition were more than just social, they were essentially political.

There was an offer by the Shiite opposition to the Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Ibn Isa Al-Khalifa to discuss jointly new reform plan, as well as the draft of the new Constitution. This shows that in Bahrain there is more trust towards the Crown Prince rather than the Prime Minister who ordered to shoot at the Shiite protesters.<sup>47</sup> If before the act of shooting the chief demands of the Bahraini opposition were more about inequality that they had faced, after shooting at protesters the nature of demands changed with more and more protesters shouting “Down with the Al-Khalifa Family”. This can be regarded as an obvious call for an end to monarchy. After all the violation that took place in Bahrain on June 29,

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<sup>46</sup> In Saudi Arabia the Shias are in minority but the areas they inhabit - the eastern Saudi Arabia - has huge oil reserves.

<sup>47</sup> Therefore, initially the conciliatory communication took place between the King and the opposition.

2011, the King initiated the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI). BICI served as the basis of national dialogue as it included five independent legal experts. The findings of the BICI were made public in November 2011. Among other things, the report found “systematic and deliberate use of excessive force, including torture and forced confessions, against protesters.”<sup>48</sup> The BICI also included specific recommendations on how to “prevent future violence against peaceful protesters and to investigate abuses committed and compensate victims.”<sup>49</sup> Upon the release of the report, King Hamad acknowledged the importance to implement the BICI recommendations and on November 26, a National Commission was established to administer the implementation of recommendations. The National Commission in turn issued the final report on March 20, 2012. The report in principle praised the government’s efforts towards the implementation of recommendations saying that, “Commission has worked hard with the Government to reform the justice, human rights, policing, security services and media sectors in a way that accords with best international practice.”<sup>50</sup>

From the analysis of events unfolding in Bahrain it should be assumed that the monarchy has largely sought to legitimize its power through the enactment of conciliatory mechanisms. For example, the Crown Prince Salman initiated “seven principles” program with the aim to launch a “parliament with full authority”, the King Hamad formed the BICI for the investigation of violence, followed by the implementation of the National Commission.

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<sup>48</sup> Kenneth Katzman, *Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy*, CRS Report for Congress (Washington DC, USA: Congressional Research Service, May 14, 2012), <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/95-1013.pdf>, p. 12

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13

<sup>50</sup> Full text of the National Commission Report is available at:  
[http://www.biciactions.bh/wps/portal/BICI/!ut/p/c5/04\\_SB8K8xLLM9MSSzPy8xBz9CP0os3gLAXNHQ093A3f3AEcjA88AQ09DFwtDYwMzY\\_1wkA48Kgwh8v6OHp7u7iB5c0tLoLyrhatzkKmxgYkxRN4AB3A00PfzyM9N1S\\_Izg6ycFRUBACcUdSf/dl3/d3/L2dJQSEvUUt3QS9ZQnZ3LzZfT0FISUdHRzBHT0Q5OTBJUFAzR0RLNDIwVTU!/?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/wps/wcm/connect/EGOV+English+Library/BICI/Actions+Taken/](http://www.biciactions.bh/wps/portal/BICI/!ut/p/c5/04_SB8K8xLLM9MSSzPy8xBz9CP0os3gLAXNHQ093A3f3AEcjA88AQ09DFwtDYwMzY_1wkA48Kgwh8v6OHp7u7iB5c0tLoLyrhatzkKmxgYkxRN4AB3A00PfzyM9N1S_Izg6ycFRUBACcUdSf/dl3/d3/L2dJQSEvUUt3QS9ZQnZ3LzZfT0FISUdHRzBHT0Q5OTBJUFAzR0RLNDIwVTU!/?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/wps/wcm/connect/EGOV+English+Library/BICI/Actions+Taken/)

## CHAPTER THREE: THEORY TESTING

In this chapter I will test three theoretical approaches introduced in earlier chapters (monarchical legitimacy, rentier state, and alliance building) to regime stability in Bahrain. My hypothesis is the following: *These three theories would predict monarchical regime stability in states which share similar patterns of behavior i.e. states which have rentier type of economies, strategic alliance with major outside powers and which enjoy strong monarchical legitimacy.*

Although Bahrain is largely regarded as a rentier state with strong monarchical legitimacy and alliance relations particularly with the United States, it has not escaped heightened political instability in the form of street demonstrations since February 2011. However, the Bahraini monarchy has essentially remained resilient in the face of the Arab Spring. This is the reason why I research Bahrain as a critical case: it has the combination of both – continuing stability of monarchical regime and a higher degree of social unrest which other monarchies have not faced. This thesis has introduced three theories which seek to explain the reason for regime stability in Bahrain and the purpose of this section is to identify whether they provide a plausible explanation.

### ***3.1 Theory of Monarchical Legitimacy***

The second theory to be tested in relation to the critical case of Bahrain is monarchical legitimacy. The concept of monarchical legitimacy stems from the assumption that the rule of a monarch is rooted in institutional foundations of statecraft. Currently legitimate form of monarchical governance is specifically present in Arab Gulf monarchies, Morocco and Jordan. There has not been a single regime change revolution in any of the Arab Monarchies which, essentially means that the monarchies have largely managed to maintain their legitimacy through institutionalization of liberal reforms. However, Bahrain is

an obvious exception to the tendency of resilient stability in monarchical states.<sup>51</sup> Unlike in Egypt, Syria, and Tunisia, there has not been actual regime change in Bahrain, and yet, in comparison with other Gulf monarchies Bahrain has been relatively more unstable. To understand why Bahrain's monarchy still holds legitimacy in the face of its population, it is necessary to get a sense of the nature of demands by opposition groups. Hence, the most critical question in this regard is: *Do Bahraini Shia opposition groups demand the end to monarchy in Bahrain?* If yes, would it mean that the Bahraini monarchy has lost its legitimacy in the eyes of its population, be it Sunni or Shia? If no, then would it mean that monarchy still holds legitimacy, but what need to be changed is the government of Prime Minister, and the institutionalization of strong parliamentary control over the powers of monarch? Generally speaking, in what is usually seen as a region resilient to any change, the Gulf monarchies are categorized as those of pure autocracies and hybrid regimes. In his analysis of democracy issues in the Arab world, Rashid Khalili argues, "there is the occasional relatively bright spot in the Arab world, such as the three Gulf countries, Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain, which enjoy some aspects of democracy and a free press."<sup>52</sup>

The legitimacy of the Bahraini monarch Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa is based on the assumption of institutional statecraft of monarchy. First of all, since his inception to power in 1999, the King himself has been rather supportive of a certain degree of political liberalization in Bahrain. The relative liberalization of political space in Bahrain has taken place since 1999 and it allowed the participation of previously banned political societies in parliamentary elections. It also paved a way for a more open and social discussion on the nature of political processes in Bahrain. The main Shia opposition movements such as Al-Wefaq took active part in the formation of relatively more vibrant civil society. This is not to

<sup>51</sup> Chapter three elaborates on the details of what took place in Bahrain since February of 2011.

<sup>52</sup> Rashid Khalili, *Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints And America's Perilous Path In The Middle East* (Beacon Press, 2005). p.61

claim that King Hamad had a genuine interest in developing political pluralism in Bahrain although he received his education in the West. The aim of liberalization should be framed within the institutional statecraft of monarchy: a monarch is essentially secure from unexpected consequences of an open political competition. Because monarch's rule is institutionalized by the constitution of the state, it cannot in principle be questioned. Hence, the visible liberalization of political space in Bahrain would not entail any limitation on the executive powers of the Bahraini monarch. Therefore, the institutional statecraft of the Bahraini monarch creates the perception of hybrid democratic rule, but in fact it aims to fend off an increase of opposition waves through the imitation democracy. Thus, without risk of losing its legitimate powerbase, the Bahraini monarchy seeks to ensure domestic political stability through the institutionalization of some the formal elements of democracy.

Religion is the second source of the monarchical legitimacy in Bahrain. The monarchical rule based on Islam is highlighted in the preamble of the Bahraini constitution which starts with the name of God and the virtues by which the rule of monarch is legitimized:

In the name of God on high, and with His blessing, and with His help, we Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, Sovereign of the Kingdom of Bahrain, in line with our determination, certainty, faith, and awareness of our national, pan-Arab and international responsibilities;<sup>53</sup>

The monarchical rule based on the Sharia Law has a strong appeal for Bahrain's regional Arab neighbors as well. The legitimacy first and foremost depends on how Bahrain is accepted by the "heavy weight" of the Arab world such as Saudi Arabia. The Bahraini royal family has a lot in common with Saudi Arabia since this is where the Al-Khalifa tribes

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<sup>53</sup> "The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain", February 14, 2002, [http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/ba00000\\_.html](http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/ba00000_.html).

originally came from. Strong bilateral bonds between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are rooted in common values of the Sharia system of governance.

Bahrain, however, is essentially a critical case when it comes to the Sunni-Shia relationship in view of the religious legitimacy of the ruling family. The constitution of Bahrain does not distinguish between the Sunni and Shia segments of population. The discrimination of the Shias though, takes place on everyday basis, but the majority of Shia is not in favor of complete regime change which would mean the end of monarchy per se. Even during the recent upheavals the majority of protesters did not demand the end monarchy. Moreover, many claim that the structure of the conflict is not sectarian but economic. If the Shia-Sunni factor does not play a significant role in the structure of the conflict, then it is safe to assume that the religious legitimacy component of the monarchical statecraft theory holds true in terms of ensuring stability. It means that the Al-Khalifa family is still legitimate in the eyes of the Shia population but the central demand of the disenfranchised population is to put limitation on the *constitutional powers* of the King i.e. to make Bahrain a true constitutional monarchy. This component of the monarchical statecraft approach is substantially challenged, but it does not mean that the opposition as a whole demands the end of monarchy per se. In other words, the Arab Spring provides us with a contextual framework in which the economic and religious factors need to be set apart so that to comprehend the true nature of events. Based on this analysis we can observe that the theory of institution of monarchy is plausible to explain to explain regime stability.

### **3.2 Rentier State Theory**

In this section two forms of external rent will be discussed: rent generated from oil exports and economic/military rent. In the Middle Eastern context, a rentier state would mean a state with significant oil resources and revenues generated from the exports of natural resources in particular oil. Secondly, such a state is also a recipient of external military and

economic aid. Having this in mind, I apply the rentier state theory on the Bahraini case. The central question of this section is: *Is rentierism a strong factor explaining the durability of political stability in Bahrain?*

To understand the rentier state factor, I will first analyze Bahrain's oil exports and oil production. Historically the first oil fields in the Persian Gulf Region were discovered on the territory of Bahrain. Around the time when Bahrain gained its independence it received most of its revenues in the form of rent from oil exports.<sup>54</sup> With less than 500 bpd in oil production the revenues were sufficient to arrange the diversification of Bahrain's economy.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, there was no serious population pressure as Bahrain's population was one of the smallest in the Gulf Region. During the 1990s, Bahrain's oil production gradually came to decline and since the beginning of the 2000s has significantly decreased. Bahrain was not even included to the oil production section of the 1996, 1997 and 1999 reports by British Petroleum.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, despite the fact that the island monarchy is surrounded with oil-exporting OPEC giants, Bahrain itself is not a member of this organization. Thus, Bahrain was never considered as a major oil producer on the regional level, but its oil production was sufficient for the emergence of a rent-seeking type of economy. As of now, Bahrain's oil reserves are expected to deplete in 10-15 whereas those of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait will last for almost another 100 years.<sup>57</sup>

Decreasing oil reserves notwithstanding, Bahrain has successfully managed to diversify its economy. As a result of it, the non-oil sector started to develop. For example,

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<sup>54</sup> J.H. Bamberg, *British Petroleum and Global Oil, 1950-1975: The Challenge of Nationalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2008) p.145.

<sup>55</sup> Oil and Gas Journal, *World Petroleum Report, 1968* (British Petroleum, August 12, 1968).

<sup>56</sup> For reference see BP reports on natural resources. A reverse trend is seen with Bahrain's natural gas production: the natural gas production in Bahrain increased from 4.5 in 1985, to 6.0 billion cubic meters in 1994. However, it was ten times less than the production levels of regional "natural gas hegemony" like Saudi Arabia or Iran.

<sup>57</sup> *Kingdom of Bahrain* (Oil and Gas Directory Middle East, 2011), <http://www.oilandgasdirectory.com/research/Bahrain.pdf>.

since 1990s Bahrain has become a banking hub of the Gulf Region. With the diversification of economy also came more investment and employment opportunities in Bahrain; however this is where the Bahraini government has failed to integrate the Shia majority into the growing workforce. This largely explains the reason why almost a third of the Bahraini population is composed of expats. Since most of the jobs in international banking and finance require qualified labor force, only a tiny fraction of local population could get such an employment. The poorly educated layers of the Shia population are unable to join this workforce simply because they lack the necessary educational degrees and skills.<sup>58</sup> In short, Bahrain's efforts to diversify its economy did not solve the fundamental discontent of the Shia majority and illustrated how a semi-diversified/hybrid-rentier economy may not lead to a sustainable development.

Therefore, Bahrain's recent uprising is often traced to the fact that its dwindling revenues from oil production make the authorities increasingly unable to buy off the currently rising popular unrest. The uprising particularly in Bahrain has revealed monarchy's growing dependence on foreign aid "to buy its way out of trouble". Subsequently, since the beginning of the unrest, Bahrain has received significant economic aid package from the Gulf Cooperation Council known as the "Gulf Marshall Plan". In essence, the ultimate goal of the "Gulf Marshal Plan" is to maintain short-term domestic stability of Bahrain, by injecting more money into welfare payments. Although the exact amount of the financial aid is not open to public, the estimated amount of surplus assets of the GCC members (excluding Bahrain and Oman) is around 1.35billion USD.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Although there are successful Shia entrepreneurs, their numbers are very small. Moreover, the discrimination of the majority of Shias and their inability to join the workforce impedes the emergence of the Shia Bahraini middle class.

<sup>59</sup> "Gulf States to Aid Unrest-hit Bahrain, Oman: Report," *Al-Arabiya*, March 2, 2011, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/03/02/139877.html>.

In a general theoretical framework, the rentier state theory ultimately provides the most plausible explanation for the necessity of accepting foreign economic aid. The evidence supports the rentier state theory: Bahrain cannot be considered a classic rentier state in a Middle Eastern context due to decreasing share of oil revenues, however, the rentier nature of economy has not changed since the Bahrain has become the recipient of foreign aid. Therefore, through the analysis of Bahrain's rentier behavior, I conclude that short-term stability would be ultimately achieved by addressing social grievances of people in distressed areas through foreign aid.

### ***3.3 Theory of Alliance Building***

The final theory to be tested in this section is alliance building. This theoretical approach essentially seeks to explain the regime stability through the strategic relationship between Bahrain and the United States on the one hand and the Bahrain-GCC alliance on the other hand.

#### **3.1.1 The U.S – Bahraini Security Alliance**

With regard to the U.S. – Bahraini alliance, in the Arab Spring context, Bahrain's strategic relationship with other powers has reflected the dual nature of the alliance. Thus, the U.S-Bahraini strategic ties, first and foremost, represent a classic relationship between *a security provider* and *a security seeker*. For the majority of the Gulf monarchies, the United States is a key security provider. Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait all have strong bilateral security ties with the United States. Bahrain, the only island monarchy of the region, has taken a special place because of the strategic location of the American Fifth Fleet. This factor essentially conditions the special meaning of the U.S – Bahraini alliance. Clearly then, this security cooperation stems from a common threat perception towards Iran by the majority of Gulf Monarchies and Bahrain in particular. Secondly, through its substantial military presence, the United States also seeks to project its power vis-à-vis that of the Islamic

Republic of Iran. Iran's current potential for power projection in the Persian Gulf is real as well as its aspirations to gain more control of the Strait of Hormuz. As far as the uninterrupted supply of oil from the region is concerned, the heavy U.S military presence in the Persian Gulf is self-explanatory. Having said the above, the key question of this section would be: *is alliance building a plausible theory for explaining regime stability as an outcome of strategic relationship between Bahrain and the United States?*

To analyze the prevailing pattern of behavior in the Gulf Region, it is necessary to understand the motivations of security actors. The British and later American military presence in the Gulf region is inextricably linked to the colonial legacy and securitization of Iran as permanent threat to Western oil interests in the Gulf Region. Another reason for heavy Western military presence in the region is the perception towards the fragility of statehood of Gulf monarchies. In particular, the history of Bahrain's securitization of Iran dates back to the initial years of Bahrain's independence. Hardline Iranian leaders have been reluctant to see Bahrain as an independent state ruled by the Sunni Al-Khalifa dynasty and considered Bahrain as being part of Iran's sphere of influence or part of the Iranian cultural areal.<sup>60</sup> Iran was overtly reluctant to recognize Bahraini independence after 1971 and in 1981 carried out an attempt for coup d'état in Bahrain. The fact that the majority of population in Bahrain belongs to the Shia sect of Islam makes them a potential target for Iran to manipulate. The threat perception of Bahrain towards Iran has caused the former to seek security from outside powers such as the USA. As mentioned earlier, the relationship between Bahrain and the U.S. is that of a security seeker and a security provider. Thus, the securitization of Iran largely explains Bahrain's prevailing balancing stance against Iran.

Balancing was present during the Cold War period as well however at that time most of the Middle Eastern countries were used as proxies against the Soviet expansionism. In a

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<sup>60</sup> 70 % of the population of Bahrain consists of Shias.

post-Cold War period the relations have evolved into a different mode. Until 2003 three major competing powers were Israel, Iraq and Iran. In the absence of Cold War - style superpower rivalry Iraqi ambitions for regional dominance became obvious. Analyzing Iraq's intervention in Kuwait Mohammad Ayoob argues,

“The end of the Cold War also influenced the Iraqi decision. This decision seemed to have been based at least in part on the Iraqi leadership's perception that given the relaxed nature of superpower relations, an Iraqi move into a small, neighboring country would not be viewed by Washington as a major shift in the bipolar equation in the Middle East in favor of the Soviet Union.”<sup>61</sup>

Ayoob further contends that preventing a single Arab state from dominating the Gulf Region was the primary U.S objective during the war against Iraq.<sup>62</sup> The USA largely maintained this matrix of regional policy up until the 2003 War against Iraq. Since the moment of toppling Saddam Hussain, the role of the United States in security issues of the region has tremendously increased. On the other hand, Iran with its uranium enrichment ambitions has been emerging as an ambitious regional counter-balance to the United States. Thus, it can be assumed that in a post-Cold War Gulf Region the mode of balancing behavior has shifted inwards and nowadays it is the regional states that seek to balance each other whereas the goal of the U.S policy is to prevent the emergence of a regional power. This picture accurately explains the balancing behavior of Bahrain in relation to Iran in the post-Cold War period.

Putting this analysis into the Arab Spring framework helps to identify on which grounds Bahrain securitizes Iran and hence tilts towards a balancing behavior. Thus, soon after the eruption of violent street protests in February-March 2011, the Bahraini authorities started to send accuse Iran of interfering in Bahrain's internal affairs. Although Iran was

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<sup>61</sup> Mohammed Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict, and the International System* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995) p.122.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. p. 123

openly supportive of political aspirations of the Shia opposition groups, official Tehran denies the accusations that it allegedly provided material help to the protesters. The information from the U.S intelligence is not precise either, with some claiming that Iran provided only spiritual support, with others claiming that Bahrainis in fact received material support from Iran as well.<sup>63</sup> The Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) established by the Bahraini Government has found no evidence of Iranian involvement into the internal affairs of Bahrain though:

The evidence presented to the Commission by the GoB on the involvement by the Islamic Republic of Iran in the internal affairs of Bahrain does not establish a discernable link between specific incidents that occurred in Bahrain during February and March 2011 and the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>64</sup>

The BICI has essentially disproved claims that Iran was actively involved in Bahrain's domestic affairs, but "the report blames Iran's media for incitement of the situation in Bahrain"<sup>65</sup> The findings of the report may sound convincing, but Bahrain's suspicion towards Iran, as mentioned earlier, has historic roots. Hence, Bahrain should be regarded as a security seeker from the alliance with the United States with the aim to balance the Iranian power projection. This squares logically with the necessity the U.S faces for its power projection in the Gulf Region. The key strategic location of Bahrain and the existence of the U.S Fifth Fleet are crucial components of power projection and hence stability in Bahrain is in the interest of its security provider. Following this further into the Arab Spring context, the outcome of the U.S – Bahraini strategic alliance relationship conditioned the silent reaction of the former to opposition protests. In other words, the Shia opposition of Bahrain did not

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<sup>63</sup> Adam Entous, Matthew Rosenberg, "U.S. Says Iran Helps Crackdown in Syria," *Wall Street Journal*, April 14, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704547804576261222747330438.html>.

<sup>64</sup> Mahmoud Cherif Bassiouni, Badria Al-Awadhi, Nigel Rodley, Philippe Kirsch, Mahnoush H. Arsanjani, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry* (Manama, Bahrain, November 23, 2011), <http://www.bici.org.bh/BICIreportEN.pdf>. p. 387

<sup>65</sup> Kenneth Katzman, *Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy*, CRS Report for Congress (Washington DC, USA: Congressional Research Service, May 14, 2012), <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/95-1013.pdf>. p.25

receive the political support of the U.S. The Obama Administration has repeatedly called for a “national dialogue”, but did not urge the King to step aside even though by the time the “national dialogue” started there had been dozens killed during protests.<sup>66</sup> This is in contrast to the U.S. stance in the cases of Libya, Syria, Egypt, or Tunisia. The rhetoric was different there since with the killings of their own population during uprisings leaders of Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya lost political legitimacy too. The U.S. position was to side with protesters as the political foundation of the opposition in those cases was domestic. In the case of Bahrain though, the political organization of opposition stemmed not only from domestic sources, but also was largely guided by such a regional hegemon as Iran. All the things considered, the necessity to contain Iran, to provide security for Gulf Monarchies, and secure supplies of oil have generated a greater interest by U.S. to project substantial stability to this region. These factors render stability through alliance a plausible explanatory variable.

### **3.1.2 The GCC – Bahraini Security Alliance**

The second form of alliance building is military aid that Bahrain received from the Gulf Cooperation Council as a result of uprisings in March-April 2011. This sub-section will seek to define the causal pattern of the GCC military deployment to Bahrain. And hence the relevant question is: *was the motive behind the military aid, prevention of growing social protests or well-calculated move to show muscles to Iran?*

The answer to this question obviously depends on who is being asked. The threat perception of the Bahraini government and the Bahraini opposition is different. For example, during an interview when asked about the reason for troop deployment, Dr. Sami Alfaraj, a security, defense and intelligence advisor to the GCC said that the basic motive behind the military deployment was to counter Iran and “its subversive terrorist elements across the

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<sup>66</sup> Mahmoud Cherif Bassiouni, Badria Al-Awadhi, Nigel Rodley, Philippe Kirsch, Mahnoush H. Arsanjani, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*. p. 166

GCC”.<sup>67</sup> However, here the line between collective security and collective defense is blurred. The GCC by its Charter does not set collective defense as one of its objectives. Careful examination of the Charter shows that there is no mentioning of the word “military” in entire document. In this context, the GCC military deployment cannot be explained by the concept of collective defense: first, because the GCC itself is not an organization of collective defense, and secondly, there is no evidence of actual war between Bahrain and Iran. For the GCC, the instability in Bahrain is caused by the terrorist groups which are regulated by Iran. In this case, the GCC reaction is more in line with the concept of collective security: threats emerge not from outside but from within. Collective security framework is also true with the underlying motive of Saudi Arabia to lead the troop deployment. Saudi Arabia is a key strategic player of the GCC and has a vested interest in subduing the Shia rebels of Bahrain. Keeping in mind that Saudi Arabia also has a significant Shia population in the east of the Kingdom, the securitization of instability in Bahrain was as a strong incentive for Saudi Arabia to step up efforts so that to maintain a zone of stability in the Gulf region.<sup>68</sup> By all accounts, the GCC troop deployment is an example of collective security within alliance building theory. Put simply, in the case of Bahrain the source of threat comes from within states and the domestic political stability is achieved through external military aid.

In sum, the present section has identified two patterns of engagement within the alliance building: collective security and collective defense. Both of these concepts are examples of alliance building. Thus, although the official narrative by Bahrain is to place the situation into the framework of collective defense, the careful examination of official documents illustrates that the GCC troop deployment is more in line with the concept of

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<sup>67</sup> Shenaz Kermali, “The GCC Is Expanding Its Army, but for What?”, July 2, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/06/2011626112649845386.html>.

<sup>68</sup> In Saudi Arabia the Shias are in minority unlike in Bahrain. But they mostly inhabit the territories rich with oil.

collective security.<sup>69</sup> The distinction between the concepts of collective security and collective defense allows us to understand the mechanism of Bahrain's alliance building with the U.S and the GCC. Thus, the analysis has shown that collective defense is in line with Bahrain's securitization of Iran and hence, is the ensuing balancing behavior towards Iran. Meanwhile, collective security explains Bahrain's securitization of domestic forces and therefore is the necessity for troop deployment to maintain stability.

### ***3.4 Three Theories Revisited***

The third chapter has analyzed three theoretical approaches applied in relation to the critical case of Bahrain. The assumption was that the theories of monarchical legitimacy, alliance building and rentier state would predict regime stability in states the abovementioned similar characteristics. Out of three theories, rentier state and alliance building retain the most plausible explanation for the durability of monarchical regimes in the Gulf region. Particularly in the Bahraini case, the rentier state theory accurately explains the changing nature of the rent-seeking system in Bahrain. The peculiarity of the Bahraini rent-seeking system is that previously it used to receive rents mainly from oil production and exports. The Arab Spring showed that the pattern of rent-seeking has been transformed: the external economic aid in the form of "Gulf Marshal Plan" is now considered a strategic rent. Judging by the outcome of the political upheavals in Libya, Egypt, and Tunisia, it would be reasonable to assume that in the absence of external economic help the stability of monarchical regime would have faced more serious challenges of survival.

The alliance building theory retains the most explanatory power for the stability of the political regime in Bahrain. As mentioned earlier this relationship is of dual nature: Bahrain being a security seeker and the U.S being a security provider. Acting as a deterrent against

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<sup>69</sup> An example of collective security framework is the League of Nations and later the United Nations whereas NATO is an example of collective defense. If collective defense presupposes permanent military bases in member states, troop deployment in a collective security framework is mostly regarded as on-demand basis.

Iran in the Gulf Region, Washington's primary is to prevent the emergence of a regional hegemon. Thus, the importance of Bahrain's location close to the Gulf oil fields and the strategic relationship with the United States largely explains USA's silent reaction on government crackdown of opposition protests. The reluctance of the United States to raise harsh criticism of the Bahraini government or lack of demands for a regime change ensured the political immunity to the monarchical leadership of Bahrain.

The GCC troop deployment on the territory of Bahrain is the second element of maintaining stability through alliance building. Bahrain's importance for the GCC raised the question about the motive for the troop deployment by the GCC. I presented a two-fold explanation: either the GCC troops were deployed as a way to contain the "Iranian terrorist" activities or to prevent the further spread of unrest to Arab monarchies. By reference to the charter of the GCC and careful examination of its mandate, I conclude that the GCC intervention, according to official rhetoric was carried out by considerations of containing the Iranian threat. In the critical case of Bahrain, this line between collective security and collective defense seems to be unclear and it affects the way the troop deployment is perceived. In my research I have shown that in the absence of a real external threat it is difficult to regard the GCC operation as an example of collective defense whereas it finds a better explanation within the concept of collective security. Having said that, I argue the GCC troop deployment to Bahrain a case in official rhetoric over the nature of threat opposes the mandate of the GCC. Thus, the GCC troop deployment aimed at providing collective security to Bahrain and other members from internal threats.

The theoretical approach of monarchical legitimacy sought to provide an answer to the question of whether the Shia opposition groups demand the end of monarchy itself or more constitutional limits on the powers of the King. The narrative of actors during the events of the Arab Spring poses a serious challenge to the concept of monarchical legitimacy.

The narrative of the opposition groups in Bahrain mostly represented by the Shia movement reinforces the argument about the ambiguity of demands. The demand for stronger constitutional monarchy is wrongly perceived with the executive power of the monarch legitimized in the constitution of Bahrain. However, the majority of the Shia opposition movements demand the change of the constitution and more limitation on the competencies of the King. Moreover, among the majority Shia, there are those who put forward political and those who have both political and economic demands. Therefore, as mentioned in this chapter, a distinction between economic and political demands should be made to understand the true nature of events. Whether the demands are political or economic determines the attitudes towards the monarch and his legitimacy. Thus, the research has revealed that the prevailing economic demands do not challenge the political legitimacy of the ruling monarchical family in Bahrain because the aim is not to remove the monarch but to address the economic grievances of people within the monarchical system. Meanwhile, the majority of political demands aim to limit the powers of the King which are legitimized in the Constitution of Bahrain. Hence, my research has found the monarchical legitimacy theory partially inconsistent for explaining the nature of monarchical stability in Bahrain.

## CONCLUSION

The current thesis has been the study of a critical case of Bahrain in the context of the Arab Spring. I have sought to explain the stability of monarchical regime in Bahrain through the testing of three theories: monarchical legitimacy, rentier state, and alliance building. My analysis has found theory of monarchical legitimacy to have the least explanatory plausibility. I have come to this conclusion based on the analysis of the narratives of opposition. I made distinction between economic and political demands. Thus, those demanding more economic rights have tendency not to challenge the political legitimacy of a monarch. Meanwhile, those who expressed their grievances in the form of political demands essentially demanded to put limitation on the constitutional powers of the King which are in principle legitimized by the Constitution. Theory of a rentier state has a stronger explanatory power. In my analysis I have found out that particularly in the Bahraini case the nature of rentier economy has been transformed. Thus, Bahrain cannot be considered anymore as a classic Middle Eastern rentier state with huge oil revenues in the form of rent. Meanwhile, Bahrain has increasingly become dependent on external aid as a means to contain the social discontent of its Shia population. The example of such a rent is the economic aid received from the GCC. Therefore, I have concluded that the transformed nature of rentier economy in the form of external aid has a strong explanatory power. The theory with the strongest explanatory power is alliance building. In this thesis I have distinguished between the U.S. – Bahraini and the GCC – Bahraini strategic relationship. In my analysis, I have found that the U.S. – Bahraini strategic relationship is that of collective defense, while the GCC – Bahraini relationship is better explained through the concept of collective security. Both concepts essentially coexist within the alliance building theory and seek to explain the nature of stability in Bahrain through the analysis of external factors.

The combination of these three theories seeks to take the research further for the understanding of events unfolding in the Arab world. Specifically the theory of monarchical legitimacy that has the least explanatory power need to be researched even further while making distinction between political and economic demands of protesters within the Arab Spring context. Moreover, the study of a critical case of Bahrain has revealed substantial differences of narratives going on in Bahrain and in other Gulf monarchies. On the other hand, the combination of theories is relevant only in the Bahraini case since it is the critical of the Arab Spring as distinct from other monarchies.

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