

FYI—STATE DEPT PROGRAMS IN BAHRAIN

State Dept, 3/19

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2011/05/163822.htm>

State Department has a long history of supporting reform efforts in Bahrain, through direct diplomatic engagement and projects of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI).

During the past eight years, MEPI has worked strategically with Bahraini partners on a reform agenda focused on political pluralism, women's rights, youth empowerment, labor, civil society strengthening and legal and judicial reform. Engagement around these issues has included opportunities for dialogue and collaboration between government and non-government stakeholders.

MEPI supports the growth and aspirations of Bahrain's peaceful civil society. Recent programming with civil society partners has focused on raising awareness of women's rights at the community level; developing documentary films and public service announcements on domestic violence; conducting trainings on disability rights, strengthening civil society, governance and transparency, human rights and media monitoring, and training for female candidates..

Since September 2009, the American Bar Association, with MEPI funding, has been working with the Ministry of Justice and local bar associations to increase judicial capacity, improve legislative drafting, and promote professionalism among Ministry officials.

Diplomatic Outreach

The U.S. Embassy has emphasized youth programs, including enhanced collaboration with academic institutions, and exchange and scholarship programs focused on promising young Bahrainis.

Secretary Clinton delivered a keynote address at the Manama Dialogue in Bahrain on December 3, 2010, in which she highlighted "human security" as one of four main principles critical to maintaining Gulf security. She defined human security as including participatory governance, freedom of expression, free access to education and employment, and women's empowerment. While in Manama, the Secretary also held a town hall meeting to directly engage with civil society and youth.

DRL Deputy Assistant Secretary Kathy Fitzpatrick visited Bahrain on January 11 to engage the Government of Bahrain and advocate for reforms, including on its incarceration policies, commitment to transparent judicial proceedings, and civil society development.

Assistant Secretary Feltman has visited Bahrain five times since demonstrations began in February to address unrest and political reform.

The State Department has expressed deep concern about the detention of civil society leaders and opposition politicians, as well as Bahraini moves to clamp down on opposition political activities and independent media. Secretary Clinton issued a statement on March 19 in support of political reform in Bahrain, saying "our goal is a credible political process that can address the legitimate aspirations of all the people of Bahrain."

Deputy Secretary Steinberg visited Bahrain May 17 and affirmed the long-standing commitment of the United States to a strong partnership with both the people and government of Bahrain and stressed the importance of full respect for universal human rights. He urged all parties to pursue a path of reconciliation and comprehensive political dialogue.

SQ=REGIME SUPPORT

US refusing to back off their support for the Bahraini regime now

NYT, 3/5

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/05/world/middleeast/05bahrain.html?_r=1

Yet those who lead and take part in the nearly daily demonstrations here say they fear at least one key difference: The United States may not be fully on their side. "The U.S. is not acting like they did in other countries," said Ali Najaf, who marched on Friday amid a sea of red-and-white Bahraini flags. "We thought they would support the people." Unlike in the case of Egypt, where President Obama promised to "stand up for democracy" and called for a change of power "now," Washington has backed the royal family in Bahrain with statements supporting the country's still-undefined proposal for dialogue with the opposition. Obama administration officials say they believe the royal family has earned the right to try to navigate this period, after heeding the United States's plea to call off the security forces who shot the protesters, killing seven of them. The president's national security adviser, Thomas E. Donilon, has conferred with the country's crown prince, Sheik Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa, whom an administration official described as sensible. On Sunday, Mr. Obama said he welcomed a "commitment to reform" by the king, Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa. But opposition parties say they do not believe there is enough pressure to produce genuine change. Opposition parties are demanding the dissolution of the government and a true constitutional monarchy to replace King Hamad's near-absolute powers. In a region ruled by sultans and kings, the prospect of a democratic uprising in Bahrain has been deeply unsettling to America's oil-producing allies in the Persian Gulf, especially because the majority of Bahrain's citizens are Shiites. The king, like most royalty on the western rim of the Gulf, is Sunni. A majority Shiite government could further alter a religious balance already upset by the ascendance of the Shiite-led government in Iraq after the American-led war that toppled Saddam Hussein. At a ramshackle mosque overflowing with worshipers on Friday, the most senior cleric of the Shiite community in Bahrain offered a veiled but somber message for the pro-democracy movement: America and the West support democratic aspirations in the Arab world — but only to a point. "They are looking out for their own interests," Sheik Isa Qassim said in his Friday sermon. Foreign countries had supported democracy around the globe and even waged wars in the name of democracy, he said. "But these countries offer only cool, verbal support when it comes to regimes friendly to them," Mr. Qassim said, an apparent reference to the Bahrain government. Protesters here say their dreams of democracy are being thwarted by the United States' desire to protect a large naval base in Bahrain, by the perception that Shiites reflexively side with Iran, and by the influence of neighboring Saudi Arabia, which analysts say would probably not accept a Shiite-led Bahrain. Justin Gengler, a former Fulbright scholar in Bahrain, said he did not expect the United States to abandon its support for the Khalifa family, which has run this country for more than two centuries. "As soon as it looks like the U.S. is not supporting royal families in the gulf region, it starts to raise eyebrows everywhere — in Qatar, in Saudi Arabia, in Kuwait, in Oman," Mr. Gengler said. "The U.S. can't turn its back on the Bahraini royal family without implicitly abandoning the idea of monarchies in the gulf."

Obama's speech avoided any aggressive push for reform in Bahrain

Quinn, 5/20

<http://sg.news.yahoo.com/obama-measures-democracy-pitch-wary-gulf-allies-212825617.html>

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. President Barack Obama signaled to autocratic Gulf allies on Thursday that he would not push too hard for political changes they fear may threaten their survival despite U.S. support for democratic reforms across the Middle East. Obama used his closely watched speech on U.S. Middle East policy to urge Bahrain's embattled ruling family to open up real dialogue with the opposition and press Yemen's president to make good on promises to transfer power. And he pledged U.S. backing for democratic and human rights values in countries in transition such as Egypt and Tunisia and in those battling for change like Libya and Syria -- as well as a new push for peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians. But Obama did not mention Saudi Arabia -- the conservative monarchy at the heart of the Arab world -- and indicated the United States was not ready to further strain alliances built on oil, counter-terrorism and opposition to Iran. "Not every country will follow our particular form of representative

democracy, and there will be times when our short-term interests do not align perfectly with our long-term vision of the region," Obama said. Political analysts said Obama's speech reflected the hard reality that Saudi Arabia, which provides 12 percent of U.S. crude oil imports, and its Sunni Gulf allies are vital to U.S. interests during a time of profound change. "There is a very delicate balancing act," said Edward Djerejian, a former U.S. ambassador to Syria and Israel. "This is a reality. And I think the omission of ... Saudi Arabia is a part of this reality," he added. Rights activists have criticized the U.S. response on Bahrain -- home of the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet -- after the U.S.-allied Sunni royal family invited troops in from its Sunni neighbors to quash protests by members of the island's Shi'ite majority. MEASURED MESSAGE At least 29 people have been killed in Bahrain since the protests started in February, inspired by Arab pro-democracy revolts that ousted the autocratic rulers of Egypt and Tunisia. Hundreds of people have been arrested and dozens put on trial following the unrest. Bahrain's government says the unrest was fomented by Shi'ite-ruled Iran -- a country both the United States and the Gulf monarchies see as a dangerously destabilizing power with nuclear ambitions. But some U.S. officials and private analysts say the protests were home-grown, at least initially. Obama sought to measure his message on Bahrain, assuring the kingdom's rulers the United States continues to support them and acknowledging their assertion that Iran had sought to take advantage of the turmoil.

US has maintained support for the monarchy in Bahrain---failure to tangibly pressure the regime makes it impossible for reformers to succeed

Lander, 5/10

<http://www.joysco.com/index.php/latest-searches/business-insider/32938-the-u.s.-keeps-its-distance-as-unrest-grows-in-bahrain>

At least 30 people have died in Bahrain, protesters and medical workers are being put on trial, and prominent opposition politicians are being arrested—but the United States has yet to toughen its talk or impose sanctions on its Gulf ally. Bahrain, a predominantly Shiite country ruled by a Sunni monarchy, plays host to the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet. McClatchy reports today that the government has bulldozed dozens of Shiite mosques. Shiite women and girls have also been detained and abused, according to McClatchy. The State Department has said little about these matters publicly, except to tell McClatchy it's "concerned by the destruction of religious sites" and is "extremely troubled by reports of ongoing human rights abuses" in Bahrain. The Bahraini government announced last week it would charge nearly 50 doctors and nurses for treating injured pro-democracy protesters. We'd previously noted the government's detention of medical workers along with protesters, activists and journalists. Last month Bahrain sentenced four protesters to death by firing squad—drawing protests from human rights groups and more statements of concern from the United States. The United States has repeatedly issued statements for months calling for the Bahraini government to engage in political dialogue rather than use force, but it has not threatened sanctions or signaled any changes in the close ties between the two countries. As we noted last month, Zainab Alkhwaja, daughter of a missing Bahraini human rights activist, announced she was going on a hunger strike in early April in an open letter to President Barack Obama. The move by was intended to pressure the United States to stop backing the Bahraini government. By April 20, she ended the hunger strike because her health was deteriorating, her mother wrote in a blog post. State Department Democracy Fellow gets little backing from State Department In February, we noted that when Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made her first visit to Bahrain in December, she was asked a little-noticed question about Bahrain's decline in the areas of democracy and human rights. The question, from then-Bahraini parliament member Matar Ibrahim Matar, was upstaged in the U.S. media by another question about whether Clinton would run again for president. Matar was upstaged again last week when news of his arrest—by armed, masked men—was buried by news of Osama bin Laden's death. In an opinion column in the Washington Post, freelance writer Michael Bronner and Rutgers Law School dean John Farmer Jr. noted that Matar in fact received training on how to organize and advance the cause of democracy as part of a State Department fellowship: In 2008, he traveled here under the State Department's Leaders for Democracy Fellowship Program, the flagship of President George W. Bush's Middle East Partnership Initiative. The program seeks to impart practical organizing tools and a deeper understanding of democracy to emerging civic leaders. In a meeting with then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Matar raised his views about representative democracy in

Bahrain and his concern that Washington has given the kingdom's ruling family a pass in exchange for hosting the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet's large base that supports the war in Afghanistan. After the program ended, Matar returned home and focused on getting elected to Bahrain's parliament. Matar—along with several other politicians from the moderate, mainly Shia opposition party—recently resigned from the Bahraini parliament in protest. Muted State Department response The State Department has "urged," "called on," and "remained deeply concerned and troubled" by the actions of the Bahraini government. Asked last week by a reporter whether the United States has done anything beyond give verbal criticism, State Department spokesman Mark Toner said that the department had dispatched an official to Bahrain several times in hopes of working "with both the government and the opposition to bridge some of these gaps." His exact remarks:

QUESTION: They have done things that you've criticized other countries for doing. Has the U.S. done anything beyond verbally criticize them? Have you raised the prospect of sanctions, or – sorry –

MR. TONER: Well, again – I didn't mean to cut you off, but Assistant Secretary Feltman's made several trips out there, and –

QUESTION: I know. But, I mean, beyond saying we don't like what you're doing, have you taken any action? Have I missed something, I'm wondering.

MR. TONER: I mean, look – I mean, it's important that our assistant secretary has spent a significant amount of time out there trying to work with both the government and the opposition to bridge some of these gaps, but also to make very clear to the government that there's no – as we've said multiple times, there's no security solution to this and that they need to take steps to address the legitimate concerns of their people. The muted reaction from the United States hasn't gone unnoticed in Bahrain. Nabeel Rajab, president of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, told Reuters that the West is "losing the hearts and minds of the democrats in Bahrain." The United States' soft touch on Bahrain, meanwhile, has stood in sharp contrast with its tough talk against the government of Syria, which has also been arresting and shooting protesters. Last week, the White House issued a statement saying, "We strongly condemn and deplore the Syrian government's use of violence and mass arrests." Secretary of State Clinton issued a similar statement, condemning "in the strongest terms" the actions of the Syrian government. In late April, President Obama signed an executive order imposing targeted sanctions against Syria.

US won't abandon Bahrain

Diamond, 4/8

<http://www.cfr.org/us-strategy-and-politics/democracy-promotion-obama-doctrine/p24621>

Obviously, the administration made a decision that it was going to pull back from democratic pressure in Bahrain for two pretty evident reasons. Number one, the presence of a major American naval base that's crucial to the projection of American power and a stabilizing influence in the Gulf. Second, the Saudis basically told the United States that Bahrain is a vital interest for them, and they can't risk the violence destabilizing oil production in an area that's dominated by a religious minority with great sympathy for what's happening in Bahrain.

Bahrain is an exception to Obama's policy of democracy promotion in the Middle East—they fear alienating key allies

Elkins, 3/31

<http://globalgeopolitics.net/wordpress/2011/03/31/mideast-washingtons-patchwork-policy-on-democracy/>
Despite this rhetoric, some analysts see Obama's approach to the uprisings in the region not as conforming to a broad strategic vision, but as hinging on concessions to regional partners' "red lines" for reforms – as in Bahrain, where U.S. ally Saudi Arabia fears that a more politically inclusive regime will tempt Iran to expand its sphere of influence. In the case of Bahrain, the Obama administration has taken a decidedly different approach than in Libya or even Egypt. Despite the Bahraini government's crackdown on civilians and popular calls for political reform, including representative governance, the U.S. has acceded to the Khalifa regime's minimal concessions and taken an ambiguous position on the presence of Saudi troops in the country, which critics say has only exacerbated sectarian tensions.

Sectarian fault lines From the outset, demonstrations in Sunni-governed, majority- Shia Bahrain were avowedly non-sectarian in character, but the narrative shifted away from the domestic political sphere and became one of sectarian conflict when Saudi troops, the majority of whom are Sunni, crossed the causeway on Mar. 14 with a mandate from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – ostensibly to protect the regime's infrastructure, but in what came across as a reinforcement of the al-Khalifa monarchic rule. As a result of the Saudi response to escalating tensions in Bahrain, and Washington's indecisiveness on the matter, Bahrainis' popular perceptions of U.S. policy regarding the uprisings in their country may be souring. "Bahrain never had a sectarian problem, Sunni and Shia having been living beside each other for years," Husain Abdulla, director of Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain, told IPS. "I'm very concerned that feelings of anti-Americanism might rise in Bahrain," he added. "[The Bahraini people had] looked on the U.S. as someone who always applied minor pressure on the government." Now, as Bahraini citizens watch images of U.S. and NATO aircraft patrolling the skies from Benghazi to Tripoli with a mandate to protect the Libyan people, they see potentially hostile GCC troops in their streets, seemingly with Western blessing, Abdulla said. Adding to this aggravation of sectarian fault lines is the supposedly looming threat of an increasingly influential Shia-led Iran. The Persian boogeyman "The government has used the sectarian card several times when they have been pressured to reform," Abdulla said. "The al-Khalifa has used Iran as the boogeyman for the West." "It is not clear that the Bahraini authorities are interested in national dialogue at this point," American University Professor Kristin Diwan added. "They are stressing that security and stability come first. They are deepening the campaign of arrests. They are clearly building a case that the arrested activists are associated with Iran and thus delegitimising their standing as interlocutors." Days before the GCC intervention, U.S. Secretary of Defence Robert Gates, after meeting with Crown Prince Hamad al- Khalifa, mentioned the possibility of Iranian meddling if the regime didn't enact sweeping reforms. "[T]here is clear evidence that as the process is protracted, particularly in Bahrain, the Iranians are looking for ways to exploit it and create problems," he said. "The best way to limit Iranian influence in the Gulf is to fully integrate Shia citizens within their respective countries," Diwan argued. "This is becoming impossible as Gulf monarchies unleash sectarian rhetoric to confront their domestic challenges." "Iran certainly had influence amongst some Bahraini Shia movements in the years following the Islamic Revolution, and inspired many," Diwan noted. "But the focus since then has moved strongly toward the national, not transnational, political arena. I do worry that there may be a move back toward transnational influence if the political reform process is frozen and the Shia are not brought back into a strengthened parliament." Putting principles into practice Distilling U.S. policy into purely strategic or military terms – such as satisfying the demands of longtime allies or the protection of U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf and its ability to project force in the region – does not bode well for popular perception among Bahraini citizens, who wish to see the U.S. as a reliable partner in pushing for real reform. While the flood of pro-democracy activism in the region has tested Obama's ability to translate good-intentioned principles into practice, the vexing nature of values versus interests continue to dominate discussions over policy, such as with the recent intervention in Libya, where the administration insists that Muammar Gaddafi must step down. "The U.S. would like to have a stable Bahrain in which the Shia are given certain rights...but at the same time I don't think the U.S. would like to see the toppling of this regime," Professor of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University Bernard Haykel told IPS. For some regional observers, the historical clichés of U.S. double standards in the Middle East thus ring true today.

More ev=SQ

Zunes, 3/3

<http://www.commondreams.org/view/2011/03/03-3>

The Obama administration's continued support of the autocratic monarchy in Bahrain, in the face of massive pro-democracy demonstrators, once again puts the United States behind the curve of the new political realities in the Middle East. For more than two weeks, a nonviolent sit-in and encampment by tens of thousands of pro-democracy protesters has occupied the Pearl Roundabout. This traffic circle in Bahrain's capital city of Manama – like Tahrir Square in Cairo – has long been the symbolic center of the city and, by extension, the center of the country. Though these demonstrations and scores of others across the country have been overwhelmingly nonviolent, they have been met by severe repression by the U.S.-backed monarchy. Understanding the pro-democracy struggle unfolding in this tiny island nation

requires putting into context the country's unique history, demographics, and its historically close relations to the United States. Though Bahrain has a long and rich history, the modern state did not receive full independence from Great Britain until 1971. This is the same year the British withdrew their security commitments from the area and the United States stepped in as the major foreign power. Bahrain is the smallest country in the Middle East, located on an island of only 290 square miles (smaller in area than New York City) in the Persian Gulf between Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Its population is only 1.2 million (smaller than San Antonio, Texas). More than half of that total consists of foreign guest workers, primarily from India and other South Asian countries. The small size of the country belies its perceived importance by the U.S. government. The fortress-like U.S. embassy in Manama is probably the largest embassy relative to the population of the host country of any in the world. The U.S. military in Bahrain, which directs the Fifth Fleet and the U.S. Naval Central Command, controls roughly one-fifth of this small nation, making the southern part of the island essentially off-limits to Bahrainis. For more than 20 years, approximately 1,500 Americans have been stationed at the base (which the U.S. government refers to as a "forward operations center"), supporting operations and serving as homeport for an additional 15,000 sailors. As University of California-Irvine Professor Mark LeVine describes it, "If the United States is Egypt's primary patron, in Bahrain it is among the ruling family's biggest tenants." Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral William Crowe once told me in an interview that Bahrain was "pound for pound, man for man, the best ally the United States has anywhere in the world."

Unlike in other Gulf states, where Americans have traditionally kept a low profile, the U.S. presence is quite visible in Bahrain as a major port of call for sailors on leave. Just prior to my last visit, the government threw a big Christmas party for American military personnel, even bringing in Santa Claus riding on a camel. This is made possible thanks to its U.S.-friendly dictator, King Hamad ibn Isa Al Khalifa. The prime minister is Prince Khalifa ibn Salman Al Khalifa, the king's uncle and reputedly the richest man in the Bahrain, who has governed for nearly 40 years. Both are firmly committed to a close strategic alliance with the United States. And close economic ties as well. Indeed, economic interests also draw the two nations together. Bahrain was the first Arab country to produce oil back in 1932. Standard Oil of California (now Chevron), later joined by Texaco, succeeded in controlling the country's oil industry through ownership of the Bahrain Petroleum Company, until the Bahraini government purchased the company in 1980. In 2005, Bahrain became the first Persian Gulf state to sign a free trade agreement with the United States. The government has embarked upon a massive privatization program in recent years--selling banks, financial services, telecommunication, and other public assets to private interests. The Heritage Foundation/Wall Street Journal Index of Economic Freedom ranks Bahrain as having the "freest" economy in the Middle East and the tenth "freest" in the world.