

RELEASE IN PART B6

From: Anne-Marie Slaughter <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Thursday, March 17, 2011 2:02 PM
To: H
Cc: Abedin, Huma; Sullivan, Jacob J; Mills, Cheryl D
Subject: a post from Amira Al Hussaini, a Bahraini blogger who is regularly on Twitter and has been ahead of the curve

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I thought you should see this – it was just retweeted by the editor of Foreign Policy. It's important because she is a liberal Bahraini who is coming out strongly against the fomenting of sectarian violence (I have put the parts I find most compelling in bold). Her point about “just Bahraini” – e.g. that the mantra for change should be neither Sunni nor Shia but Bahrainis standing for Bahrain seems to me to be a good way to argue against BOTH Iranian and Saudi intervention – as well as a line that should appeal to ordinary Bahrainis (and Egyptians, Tunisians, etc.). NB the following from her post: “we will need to step out of the noise, call out corruption and rise above all the mistrust and work towards a common goal: A Bahrain we will all be proud to live in and work together for its progress and prosperity.” Your arguments about what ordinary people want all over the world – opportunity, a chance to improve the lives of their children, etc are something you can and should fall back on here - -that this is not just something that is happening in the Middle East – these are universal aspirations that different groups of young people in the Middle East are finally claiming for their own.

Let the fun begin.

The “fun” started last night - and as expected there was a face-off, between protesters and the police force in the village of Karzakan.

And as is the case, there are two versions of the story:

The Ministry of Interior surprisingly opened a Twitter account last night and tweeted:

Illegal rally in Karzakan 3 policemen attacked, Police had to fire 2 rubber buttons. 1st as warning shot 2nd bounced & hit a demonstrator

I know, it reads like a cartoon script, but that is the problem with 140-character messages, particularly those written by sci-fi writers.

The other side paints a story of horror and gore, the use of excessive police brutality, casualties, and loads of tear gas, rubber bullets and shot guns - all documented with photographs being mass circulated on BBM, the Internet and word of mouth.

Bint Battuta in Bahrain translates the demands from the protests, starting across the country today here. And while most of them are legitimate, and something each decent Bahraini aspires to, a copy-cat revolution, with a Facebook event, is not what a sectarian divided Bahrain needs today.

These marches if anything will continue to fan the flames of sectarianism, pitting one neighbour against the other, in a country where mistrust between the two sects is becoming the trademark of our existence. We all know that the protests will be quashed. The riot police will not smile to the protesters and let them do their bit and go to their homes. There will be a crackdown, and it will be excessive, hard and brutal - but then every protester taking the streets already knows that.

Over the past few days I watched with horror as Bahrainis plummeted to the dark side, with new name tags on every ungrateful soul not drooling at the government and the scraps it throws at us to play fetch with. Fetch because whatever goes into one pocket, goes out the other. And play because even if one gesture or the other is genuine, the big picture shows that there is some big flaw in a reform project we all welcomed with open arms but are now becoming disillusioned with.

As you can see, I am not a huge fan of the government. I am also not a fan of stirring unrest in Bahrain. And I am also totally against the way the security forces will clampdown on any dissent or opposition - the same opposition I am not a fan of because of my liberal leanings, which don't mix well with the turban bearded mantra. **But having said all this, my sympathy is with my country men and women, with the poor and needy, with those working hard to make ends meet, with those striving to have a roof on their heads, with those studying hard and eager to join the job market - with the decent Bahrainis out there who want to live in a land of equal opportunities and feel proud that they are Bahrainis - Just Bahraini, Not Sunni or Shia. (By the way, Just Bahraini - a bloggers initiative to fight sectarianism is BLOCKED by the Government of Bahrain!!!!)**

What I am with is a civil dialogue and what I want to see today is the real Bahrainis standing up and stopping any bloodshed, anger and correcting the wrongs of the past. I also want to see goodwill and trust - trust from both the government and the people. I want us to believe and I want to be able to dream of a better Bahrain for my children. I want us all to give each other the benefit of the doubt and develop a capacity to listen to each other without calling each other unpatriotic, traitor or an agent of the West or Iran.

As Bahrainis, we need to sit down with each other and address our long list of woes, and work together on solving them. Sandwiched between Saudi Arabia and Iran, it would be foolish to demand a full democracy, with real emancipation, freedoms and citizens rights. I understand and accept that as this is my country and this is my destiny. What I do not accept and will never accept is the cesspit of sectarian bigotry we are drowning in.

The government needs to stop its games, the mental ones particularly, because all decent Bahrainis, Sunnis and Shia, are aware. The hoarse crow's caw will continue to reverberate but we will need to step out of the noise, call out corruption and rise above all the mistrust and work towards a common goal: A Bahrain we will all be proud to live in and work together for its progress and prosperity.

My own family and network of friends include people from the full spectrum of Bahrainis - Sunnis and Shias, those who spend more time in the Matams and mosques than with their families and those who cannot go a day without breaking one religious ruling or another - and we all live in peace, accepting each other and civil in the way we treat one another.

Having said all this: I will not march in the streets. I will stay put, surrounded by my cats and loved ones, hoping for peace in my restive country.