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## **“Bahrain at the Boiling Point? Failed Reforms, Mounting Frustration”**

**Project on Middle East Democracy**

**Thursday, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012, 3:00 pm–4:30 pm**

**1779 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC**

On Thursday, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace hosted an event by the Project on Middle East Democracy titled “Bahrain at the Boiling Point? Failed Reforms, Mounting Frustration.” In light of recent developments in the Gulf Nation, the event was held to address the progress toward reform thus far, the steps that need to be taken next, and the role of the U.S. in moving toward a peaceful political solution. Panelists were **Joost Hiltermann**, deputy program director for the Middle East and North Africa at the International Crisis Group, **Khalil Al-Marzooq**, Former Member of Parliament and now a member of Al Wefaq, and **Tom Malinowski**, the Washington director of Human Rights Watch. The panel was moderated by POMED Executive Director **Stephen McInerney**.

**Joost Hiltermann** acknowledged that the recommendations set forth in the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) report take hard work and extensive effort, but said the government has fallen too far short of implementation. **Hiltermann saw three salient issues: there are political prisoners still in jail, there is no level of accountability for security forces (particularly high level), and there is no minority representation in the security forces.** Discussing the reforms, he said, “the regime does not seem to have its heart in it, and I assure you, it doesn't.” He then discussed the opposition, and said the Bahraini government has changed the narrative: last year, Bahrain’s uprising was simply the next chapter of the Arab Spring. **Today, the government has pushed a sectarian narrative that portrays the opposition as a Shia movement that is Iranian-backed. “The notion that Iran is involved is without evidence,” he said.** In closing, Hiltermann emphasized that the regime must seriously consider implementing the BICI recommendations and make solid strides toward political dialogue. Regarding the opposition, he urged clear and public condemnations of any violence from protesters to maintain credibility of a peaceful movement.

**Khalil Al-Marzooq** stressed the sincerity of the opposition in wanting a democracy. He said Bahrainis are living in a state that does not provide security for its citizens, and oppresses anyone that opposes it. **He stated that every element of the government and society are formed in a way that serves the ruling family, not the people.** He blamed this institutionalized flaw for the failure of **John Yates** and **John Timoney** to truly reform the security system; “the system doesn’t allow for that,” he said. Al-Marzooq asked the international community: what do you want to see? You can wait and see how this “match” plays out, or you can support the calls for democracy. **He concluded by emphasizing that the opposition is very open to dialogue as long as it is credible – such as the one the international community is calling for.**

**Tom Malinowski** recounted his arrest during his most recent trip to Bahrain, in which he believes the foreign presence deterred any mistreatment. Based on interviews he did with Bahrainis during his visit, he can confirm the ongoing mistreatment of protesters and detainees. One positive result of the BICI report, he said, is that there has been a significant reduction in abuse and torture within police stations. However, that abuse has now been pushed out into the streets, and protesters continue to be mistreated after being arrested. **Malinowski said reform implementation has “hit a brick wall,” citing Abdulhadi al-Khawaja and other political prisoners still detained as an example.** He reminded the audience: when demonstrators are met with violence, they do not run away; they become more desperate and more determined. **He concluded with four recommendations: the King must begin by releasing all political prisoners in order to pave the way for further reforms; the U.S. must unwaveringly call for all BICI recommendations to be implemented to the fullest; the U.S. should, at least in private, explain that time is running out for the Bahraini government to reform; the Fifth Fleet gives the U.S. leverage to say that the navy presence is not sustainable if a peaceful political solution is not attained.**