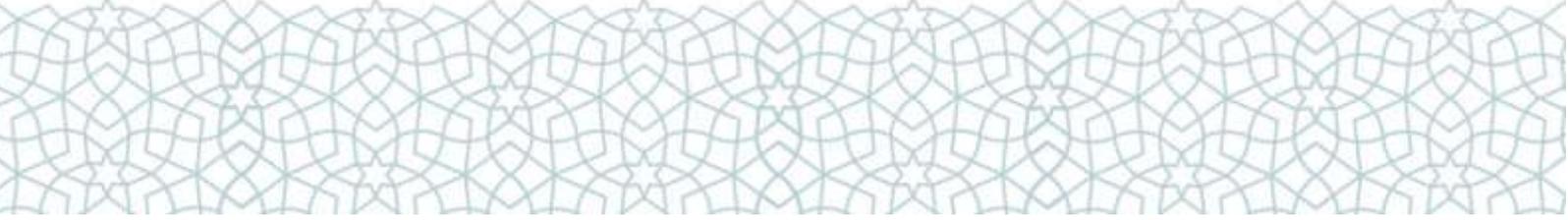


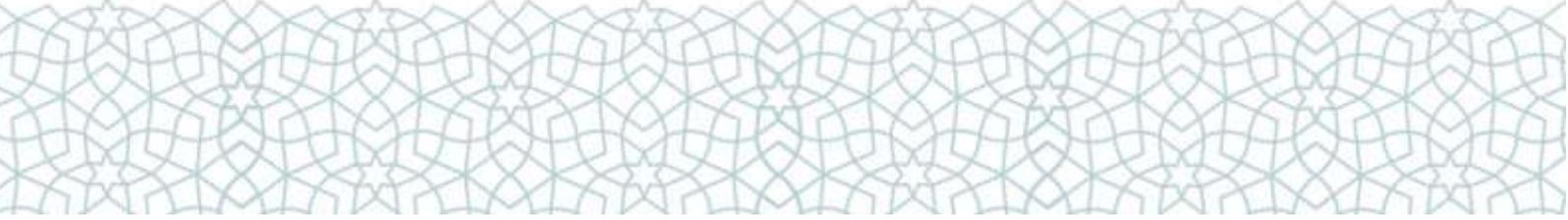
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A Special Report



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A Conversation with Payne

An Insider's View of the American's for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain

By Mitchell Belfer

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Rome, Italy

Part 1: A Short Testimonial

In March 2016, while attending the Geneva Human Rights Council, I was confronted by members of the delegation from the American's for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) in the Council itself. First, the International Advocacy Officer, Michael Payne, sought to dissuade me from asking further questions about the legitimacy of his organisation. Then, the Iraqi photography team-of-two that accompanied Michael Payne, misrepresented themselves as Bahraini journalists - essentially lying in order to speak to me outside the chamber - and threatened me in front of an eye-witness from one of the European delegations who happened to be on the phone when the incident occurred. The next day, I agreed to meet and speak to Michael Payne in the refractory of the UNHRC.

As we sat on the low-laying chairs, it was clear to me that three of the adjacent tables were comprised of people that work with Michael Payne and the other NGOs that claim to understand and work for the interests of the Arab Gulf. Their presence around our discussion table was a tactic of intimidation and, as I found out six months later, to try and get an audio feed of me saying something controversial. Our conversation has since been leaked and a copy sent - by one of Michael Payne's former associates - to the offices of the Euro-Gulf Information Centre.

Following this conversation, the ADHRB launched a campaign of slander and misinformation against my person. They attempted to discredit my name and academic position by writing slanderous letters to the Governing Board of the Metropolitan University Prague, where I had held the position of Head of Department for the Department of International Relations and European Studies. The ADHRB had sent an accusatory letter threatening to sue the university if it did not take disciplinary action against me for a statement in the Arabic press that contended that some of their fundraising could be used for violence in the Middle East. This allegation is currently being handled by the EGIC legal team. At the same time, a series of threatening telephone calls were directed at me from internet sources, which are being investigated by the police. All in all, the experience of dealing with the ADHRB has been very problematic as they are comfortable with tactics of intimidation, slander and the making of false claims in pursuit of their interests.

Yet my conversation with Michael Payne did shed light on a number of important themes in relation to how the Motley Crew of unaccountable, supposed, Human Rights NGOs operate-- in Bahrain, the Middle East and around the world. At a time when Human Rights are being manipulated for otherwise narrow, nefarious, interests, it is important to understand just how far removed some groups are from the areas they cover.

The following is the transcript of my conversation with Michael Payne. Notes in [brackets] are analysis added for this publication.

Part 2: A Paineful Conversation

*** Start ***

Michael Payne: Certainly we have seen some of the publications that (...)

Mitchell Belfer: I haven't really written very much about you.

Michael Payne: Well you have certainly referenced us. We have read that. So we work within a coalition of NGOs (...)

Mitchell Belfer: Yes. And like 90% of them are the same people, so it is not a coalition of NGOs so much as a coalition of different named NGOs with the same people. Basically it is the same NGO with different names.

Michael Payne: We have different staff.

Mitchell Belfer: Not really. And the core staff – at least in private bills – the core staff are exactly the same and then when they are not the same they are completely ambiguous, nobody knows who they are.

Michael Payne: Because of security concerns we (...)

Mitchell Belfer: Well you say because of security concerns we are not going to post the people who are related but that is rubbish. You know it. Because in one organisation you can, and in the other you can't? So from my point of view when you are exploring such an important issue like human rights there should be as little ambiguities as possible. And when there are ambiguities questions arise. So it is a normal thing to ask questions.

Michael Payne: We have our Washington staff – about five people, there is another base in London that's 3 people.

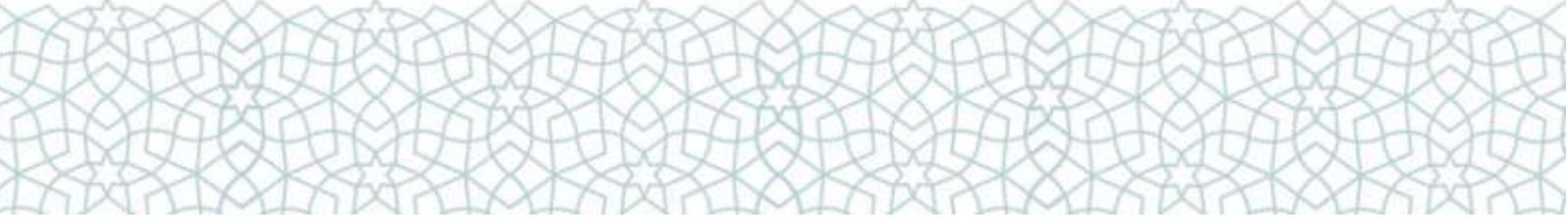
Mitchell Belfer: Are they all here today?

Michael Payne: No.

Mitchell Belfer: How many of you from Washington are here today?

Michael Payne: Two.

Mitchell Belfer: So in Geneva there is only 2 of you?



Michael Payne: Well actually 3. So we have someone now who is like a part time staff, who is here but we don't have office here. We are trying to be more active here, trying to establish something but it is in the process. And then in Brussels there is the one, one full time staff. There is like little different things that we have (...) that are rotating in Washington. So the staff is on our website but I don't think that we post profiles of the people.

Mitchell Belfer: Have you ever visited the country [Bahrain] before?

Michael Payne: I have not. I have requested visa.
[the international advocacy officer of an organisation that deals exclusively with Bahraini has never actually been to Bahrain]

Mitchell Belfer: Why?

Michael Payne: Why?

Mitchell Belfer: Yes. Why and when?

Michael Payne: So I have requested one [visa] in December, which is now almost 5 months. I have sent a letter of request to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Mitchell Belfer: You know that you don't need visa, right. As an American you don't need a visa.

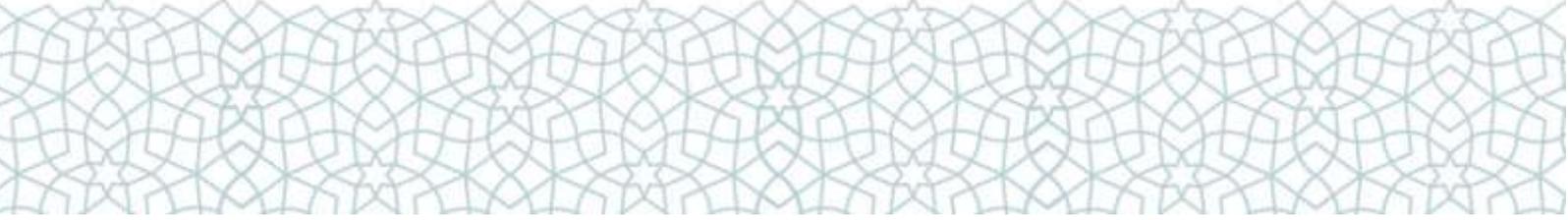
Michael Payne: So, ok, you don't need a visa but if you show up they will watch you and turn you around. So it is cheaper for us not to pay for the flights going one way there and one way back just trying to get in. And we are trying to be as open and transparent with the government saying we would like to come to the country, we like to request meetings with the government and the national institutions for the human rights as well as civil society.

Mitchell Belfer: So first, why would you send it to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs?

Michael Payne: Because they are the ones who grant the visas.

Mitchell Belfer: No, they are not. The Ministry of Interior grants the visas, like in all countries. Any address for a visa issue to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of course is not going to be answered. It is the ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Michael Payne: Well we were directed. When we were asking about this process in Bahrain, what should we do, they directed us to send it to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



Mitchell Belfer: When were you founded – like an organisation?

Michael Payne: Initially in the early 2000s there was a group of Bahrainis – Bahraini Americans, asking for asylum in New Hampton, Alabama.

Mitchell Belfer: That is so strange.

Michael Payne: Yes. It's like where the Bahraini communities sort of landed. So initially we were more of an organisation that was helping recent arrivals (...) helping the community to articulate to their congressional representation to push for greater human rights (...)

Mitchell Belfer: How many Bahrainis could possibly be in your organisation? From what I understand is that most of your support base are Iraqis. And most of the people, even your journalist friend [the man that had intimidated me the day before] is an Iraqi. He is an Iraqi. He is not a Bahraini at all.

Michael Payne: Well he works for Bahrain Today, that is like a press organisation.

Mitchell Belfer: Yes, but you know he tried to pass off as a journalist from the Bahrain News Agency.

Michael Payne: I don't know anything about it.

Mitchell Belfer: Well he introduced himself as a representative of a Bahraini news agency instead of Bahrain Today which is quite irresponsible

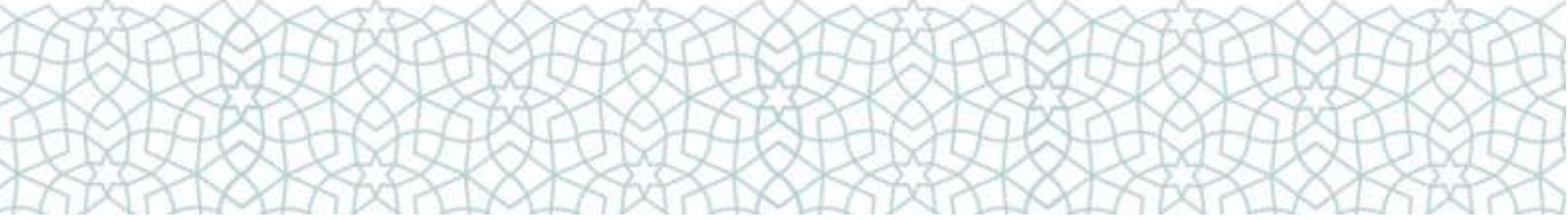
Michael Payne: That is an issue for them. I have no control over that behaviour.

Mitchell Belfer: I understand that. But you know when you are seen as a coalition it hurts the image of the coalition. One member of the coalition falsely introduces himself.

Michael Payne: I wouldn't call him a member of that coalition. It's a press agency that sort of works as a shared photographer.

Mitchell Belfer: I know. The point is that there seems to be a disproportion of non-Bahrainis working together with your organisation.

Michael Payne: So, our organisation officially has a focus beyond just Bahrain. So when we first started we were only focused on Bahrain. But then over time we have grown in both capacities – staff, and with our reach as organisation and focus. We can also see – it is clear – that what happens in Bahrain is not only in Bahrain. You know like Saudi Arabia has regional influence over Bahrain. If there is going to be some changes that are substantial in Bahrain to human rights it has to come with Saudis as well to some level. And there are so many issues that cross over between all the GCC states. So now we have a dedicated focus to Bahrain and Saudi Arabia and then we try to also focus on the other GCC states. That is really the boundaries of where we work.



Mitchell Belfer: But this is why you have to visit Bahrain because you cannot put those two countries together. It is impossible because Bahrain is a completely open society and unless you go there you won't see it. And you know, people can tell you all kinds of stories – but these are usually the people who have one issue or another and also people (...)

Michael Payne: People on the ground.

Mitchell Belfer: Yeah, let me tell you on the ground. Who lives on the ground. You know if you want me to introduce you to a Jewish Bahraini – did you that there are Jewish Bahrainis??

Michael Payne: Yes. 36 of them. The ambassador to the US.

Mitchell Belfer: Not just the ambassador to the US but there are also members of the Shura Council. And I can also introduce you to Shia members of the government, or Shia business people. A Hindu community of 200 years – 200 years! Go to Saudi Arabia and show me what?

Michael Payne: Well of course, they are totally different.

Mitchell Belfer: Go to Iran and show me a non-book people! What happened to the Baha'i?

Michael Payne: Yes, but that is not part of our organisational focus.

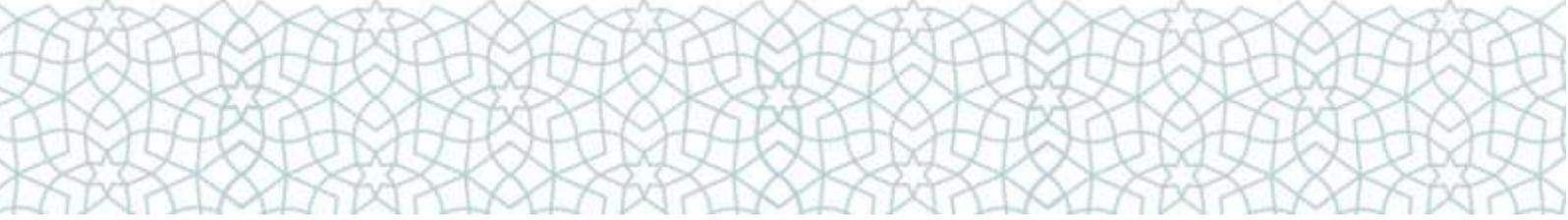
Mitchell Belfer: I understand. But for me it is – you know if you expanded your horizons and focus - don't you think it is also time for a [inaudible]

Michael Payne: That is certainly a discussion we have had a lot of times.

Mitchell Belfer: Don't get me wrong. I think all kind of work is good and we don't necessarily need to agree on certain things. I have been to the country – Bahrain – 32 times. I have made a huge research and written a very big book from 2012-2013 in which I look at every aspect of the society. Not just the strategic, because that is my area of focus, it is strategic studies, it is not internal politics but I looked and I walked over every centimetre of the country. And I have been like 32 times. I have been to Kuwait a dozen times. I have been to Qatar a dozen times. And I have been from one side of the Middle East to the other and I can tell you now honestly – if you were to really to run a comparative analysis between one civil society versus another...

Michael Payne: And that is partly why we have a focus on Bahrain – we have always looked at Bahrain as the area that has the most potential to have improvements because it has a civil society. You have a lot of institutional mechanisms, you have civil society, that have some space to operate but you don't have that in other GCC countries so we recognise that and that's why we see our opportunities there. At the same time, we see a lot of space being closed and that is a trouble for us.

[this has never been publicly stated]



Mitchell Belfer: That's the thing. When you go there you will see spaces that are opening. For example I just lead there a delegation of European members of parliament and the whole purpose of it is to create spaces. Neutral spaces so not only people in Bahrain but people in the GCC – because there is a GCC-EU council – actually my affiliation is rather closer to the [inaudible]. So I am not even here – in this institution - because of Bahrain. I am here in the role as an editor.

[In Bahrain] I was surprised to meet the ombudsman and the ombudsman deals with the issues related to the alleged abuse of police. For example, the accusations of police are that they are being abusive at certain times. And so instead of having the number plates written in small numbers on the number plates, easily covered up, so police cars for example now have number plates along both sides of their cars. And these are the things that you don't really realise unless you go to the country and see what it used to be and what it is now. So anybody who is going to make complaints would have the police number much easier and the ombudsman was so open about it and explained the very fact that what their mandate is and how the ministry has paid attention to them because they have a mandate, you know to show to people that they are available. And what was most interesting is how few times the Al Wefaq have has used the Ombudsman office – never. So there has not been a single complaint but the only complaint is that the reforms don't go far enough.

[Al Wefaq does not use the mechanism in place for investigating alleged abuse by the police]

Michael Payne: Well we have tried that.

Mitchell Belfer: You have tried the ombudsman?

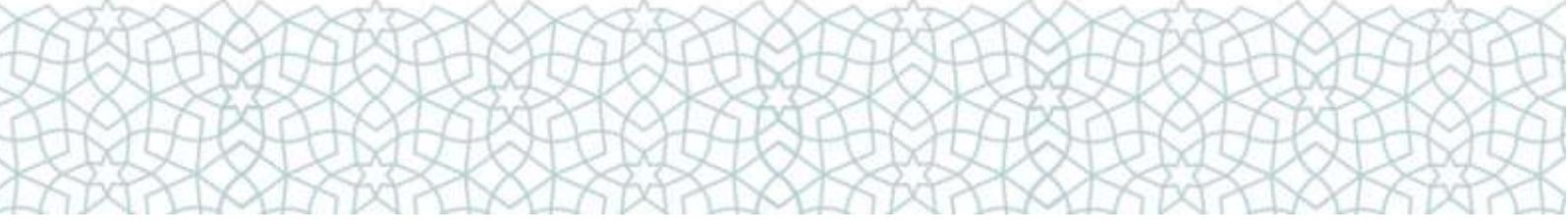
Michael Payne: Yes, we used to send a number of complaints to the Ombudsman office.

Mitchell Belfer: When?

Michael Payne: Throughout late 2014 and until summer of 2015. We started receiving information that people were facing torture because of the complaints to the ombudsman which were sent by us and that individuals were further beaten and further tortured and imprisoned, they were told indirectly: 'You know what you said about to the ombudsman, this is for talking to the ombudsman.' So we stopped that complaint process to the ombudsman's office so people would not be arrested for it anymore. Also during that time we sent about 36 complains to the ombudsman's office without any sort of reply. On behalf of victims, their families consent with lawyers as well and we never saw any replies and it wasn't until Nabeel Rajab went to the ombudsman's office and said: 'I know you are getting these complaints, why isn't something happening about this?' And only after the meeting we started getting responses from the ombudsman's office.

Mitchell Belfer: And what were the responses?

Michael Payne: It has been limited to saying: 'We have noted this. We are starting to look into it.' But this is now almost a year later for the latest complains and we haven't seen any sort of



movement for these cases and we have some follow-ups with the victims, with the families, with our lawyers with us as well as the organisation.

Mitchell Belfer: This is a completely academic question because I don't know. I know how to file a complaint because we went through the office but how can you follow a filed complaint from the outside on behalf of them.

Michael Payne: They accept it from the outside. Well as I said they have acknowledged, they have accepted a number of our complaints since that discussion with Nabeel Rajab. So we know that it is within their process.

Mitchell Belfer: Okay so now they started two processes it. Ok.

Michael Payne: We haven't seen any sort of results from these processes and then, of course, talking to individuals about their experience with the ombudsman's office ... there isn't a lot of confidence in that office, they are not receiving a lot of follow-up indications.

Mitchell Belfer: So if you could choose like 3 of your priorities, like organisational priorities - let's say in the next twelve months we are sitting here and in one year from now is 2017 and we are sitting here and having the same conversation. If you could say now in 2016, one year from now we hope with our organisation we will achieve... what would you say?

Michael Payne: So within the next year we have Bahrain's UPR and it's a big opportunity for us and for international community to take a stance on the entire comprehensive situation of human rights in Bahrain. It is a non-political mechanism, we have a constructive approach and the purpose of a request for a Visa to visit the country was to take part of the international consultative process for the UPR so working with that process, with Gulf states, with UPR mechanisms, with UNCHR we hope to see an accurate and comprehensive view of what the situation is and making steps into to the recommendations that are actually for the Bahraini side going to address a lot of the things that are ongoing and systematic. So that is what we have in mind and I know we are certainly looking to work more on some of the other GCC states. I think that is some of our priorities, more depends whether or not we get more grants to fund our projects.

Mitchell Belfer: Where do you get your grants from?

Michael Payne: From a variety of places, from open society foundations.

Mitchell Belfer: Like The Open Society?

Michael Payne: Yes, from Soros there is a fund in Norway, from individual donors within the community and we have a number of places that get grants to NGOs.

Mitchell Belfer: Well you have to tell me because I would be very happy to get some reference of those because we have in the Czech Republic terrible bureaucracy - like ridiculous.

Michael Payne: We don't take any funding that is from the US government. As an American NGO either you don't want to get perceived as actually having to portal any of our advocacies to Washington. We want to be perfectly independent; we have our criticism of the US as much as of their policies. That is sort of a line that we have taken as well for our funding priorities. We are a red people NGO. We are accredited with the (..) We are members of the [Soros alliance] I don't know, just seeing some of the things that your organisation was sending out, particularly to the members of the European Parliament, regarding either us or our other coalition organisation seems to really question whether we are a legitimate NGO and whether we are doing work that is trying to honestly address human rights concerns in the country.

Mitchell Belfer: No, no, that is not the point. The point is that when you have an organisation that is called Americans for democracy and human rights in Bahrain - that is one thing but when you say that you are the Gulf human rights centre and there is a disproportion...in reporting and attacking.

Michael Payne: We are actually not.

Mitchell Belfer: I know but that is what I mean. There is actually a connection between all these organisations and whether they are official or by people who share seats... the point is that when you have these larger organisations looking into human rights in the Gulf and they only focus on Bahrain and/or Saudi Arabia and that is a total mismatch and it needs to be exposed because if you type in the search engine looking for Iran you get one page of human rights stories. And then you type in Bahrain and you have 40 - that is a ridiculous imbalance and that is an imbalance that indicates that there is an agenda.

Michael Payne: Well with that – I mean our work is focused on (...)

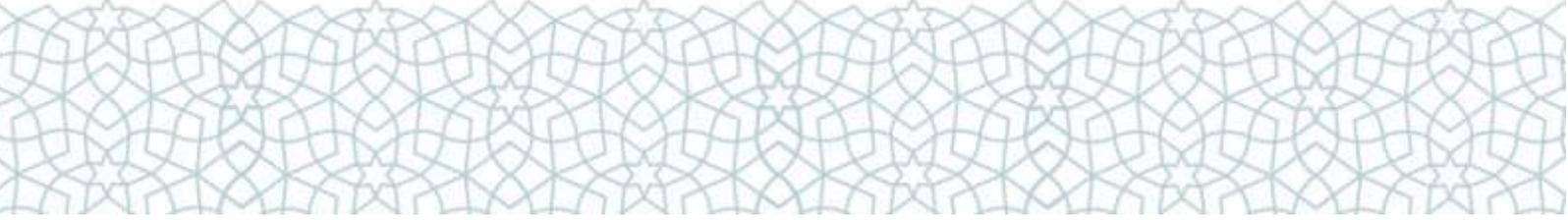
Mitchell Belfer: Not you, I mean in general.

Michael Payne: As far as GCHR goes, it is that we work on similar areas and we don't have this no-shared staff between anybody, we have no influence on what they do.

Mitchell Belfer: Once again - this would be made so much easier if everybody would just like a list the people who are actually on their staff

instead of hiding behind ambiguities. You know if you are based in America or Greece, whatever, you should not be concerned about some kind of issue. You just say the people. And I'm not talking about you, I mean in general - the creation of ambiguities on the international level is what sparks these arguments.

Michael Payne: So some of London's staff don't want to be listed on the website because they want to be able to travel back to Bahrain and working for the organisation is certainly grounds



for the Bahrainis to either not let them (...)

Mitchell Belfer: What I'm trying to tell you is that 90% of your image problem is that there are so many ambiguities and so many things that nobody knows and so anybody who is doing research about Bahrain or the Gulf gets confronted with the story of the story of the exact same thing. There are like 3, or 4 narratives about this sectarianism in the country and the narrative is false.

Michael Payne: Have you seen the narrative coming from the UN special procedures?

Mitchell Belfer: Yes, but there is not a coincidence, you also get the same narratives for example about demographic imbalances. It doesn't mean it is right. You know the BBC in 2006 long before the crisis had numbers 70:30 in terms of demographic distribution. Over the span of about 5 years after this, just also before the crisis, it changed to about 40:60. Now it is somewhere about 55:45. I mean these narratives are so mistaken...I mean what do you think about this situation?

Michael Payne: Well it is hard to know because you also have practices of what Bahrain does, you have them regularly revoke citizenship of those that are Shiite and you have them granting citizenship to Sunnis who are not Bahrainis.

Mitchell Belfer: Well it is hard to know because you don't have a question on the census. That is why it is hard to know because Bahrain doesn't ask somebody are you a Shiite or a Sunni. Because if you have ever seen the census sheets they only ask you what religion you belong to. That's it, there is no 'are you Sunni or Shiite' so it is impossible to tell and the other thing and you know if people have..

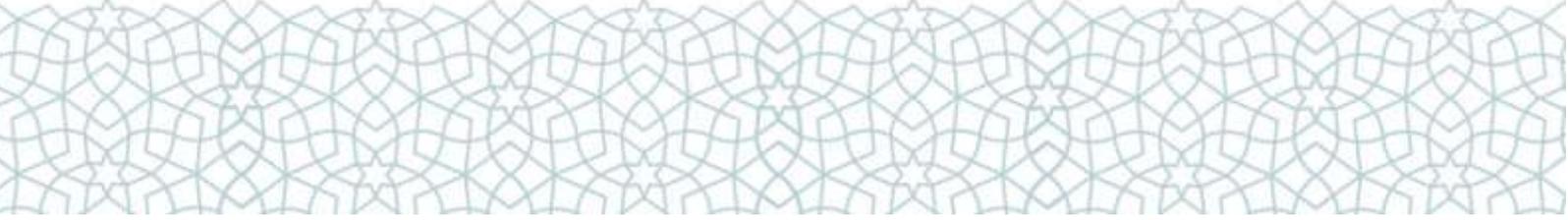
Michael Payne: That is an issue that the government should address.

[arguing in favour of sectarian identity?]

Mitchell Belfer: No. Why should they? It is a nation state; they don't need to know the sect. Because do you want to know the real truth behind it? In major families there are Shiite and Sunni and so what are you going to do - start determining like in Lebanon? Saying well you are a Shiite and you are a Sunni and next time there is a conflict let's fight?! Of course not and so the problem is that the sectarianism is not part of the society. It is just not.

Michael Payne: Well we're looking at 2011. You have Sunnis and Shiites together saying that there are no differences and that this is a national struggle and I completely agree with that. But there have been some serious sectarian policies from the government to try to drive that pledge to separate, and to target and discriminate against the Shiites.

Mitchell Belfer: This is something that I just don't see; and if you want to go back this is one of the narratives – granting citizenships. The reality is that the first wave of granting the citizenship was for Palestinians in 1960s. So if we want to lay bare about the question, let's bring up the Palestinians and ask Bahrain why they granted Palestinians nationality after the 1967 Arab-



Israeli war and the occupation of the West Bank. Ask them bring that fact to the international level. Let's have this discussion because the Palestinians, one of the most humiliated communities on Earth have no place to go and no asylum except Bahrain. One of my very best friends growing up was a Palestinian girl from Bahrain who explained to me very clearly how she feels about the country having her parents being allowed in because of what happened in 1967. So if we want to start talking about policies and things that are post 2011 no, they are certainly not. It is a heritage that goes back further. The Iraqis in 2003 and 2004, they couldn't find a home and not just Sunnis but Shiites also. When there was a problem, when there was and migration flow even a small place like Bahrain with only 560 000 people – we should keep that in mind okay -Saudi Arabia has 27 million and Iran has 81-82 million and then with so much attention to Bahrain with half a million ... it just seems a bit unfair.

Michael Payne: Well it is a small country, it is a small territory and there are less people there but the fact is that systematic abuse has been happening and just because there is a small amount of people (...)

Mitchell Belfer: Well I am not saying that. You know if those allegations are founded or not, it's not the point. The point is we are talking about the narrative of migration and we are talking about the narrative of migration flows and granting citizenship and if you believe the hype, and you think that they are granting every Pakistani or Bangladeshi... they are not.

Michael Payne: You see them entering security services.

Mitchell Belfer: No you don't. You see people who are in a private security standing in front of banks, you see things like this.

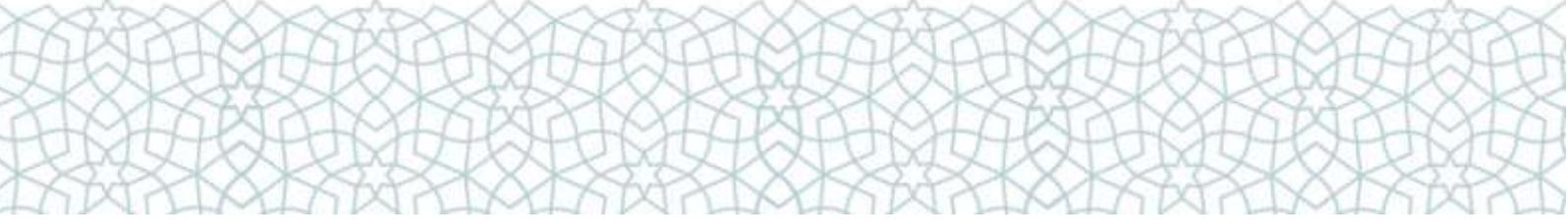
Michael Payne: We are talking about those that are prison guards (...)

Mitchell Belfer: Yes, the same that you find in any country on Earth that has a higher standard ... you will find people in every sector. You find Indians and Pakistanis in the security services, you will also find them in the bank, you will find them serving people (...)

Michael Payne: But they are nationalised.

Mitchell Belfer: This is not how it works; you can still participate in different sectors of society and it takes you up to 20 years to get a nationality it is not an easy process at all. People get little identity cards, like you get in Europe for example if you have been here for 5 years or in some countries like Denmark or Italy if you have been there for 3 years. If you register, you get your little identity card that entitles you to do things but you are not a citizen, you cannot vote in elections.

Some people end up going home because they cannot bring their families over the situation is ... well I met with an NGO that deals with migration and issues of South Asians and their files are huge they are trying to deal with people who after 15 years get their visas revoked. People who have worked in the security services, people who tried to bring their families over and even people who brought their families over only to have them leave, people who have been abused



you have a spectrum of issues that have to be dealt with. I am not trying to tell you that there are no issues but the main narratives that are being promoted - the Sunni vs Shiite relationships A) neglect the fact that the society is much more diverse than Shiite vs Sunni and it entails...you know if you want to be a human rights organisation that deals with Bahrain you also have to deal with handicaps you know people with physical and mental disabilities, you have to deal with women's issues and not just women's issues of the Shiites and Sunni...

Michael Payne: Well these are all the issues that we do.

Mitchell Belfer: Well not everywhere, I mean I have seen your work and not anywhere on the level that we would need to see as a true representation of what happens in Bahrain. Members of the blind society, or we had a guy over in Bahrain who does sign language, he is deaf and he met members of the deaf community in Bahrain and to make these spaces for themselves. There is no coverage of people with visible disabilities and their connections to the outside. Human rights organisations that are specific you also have to take the good and the bad and not where there is a negative you report it.

Michael Payne: The second report of the (..) it's clearly good at work and but we haven't see the government do actions along with recommendations. We want to say when something is positive and when [Abraham Sharif] was released from prison, we said that this was a good thing, when they pardoned Nabeel Rajab we said it was a good thing.

Mitchell Belfer: But these are all part of the same narrative. You know there are so many other things for good human rights organisations, NGOs to work on that are beyond that kind of politicised stuff.

Michael Payne: Well that is freedom of expression and assembly that belongs to core of human rights issues, it is such a major part of the work that we are doing, I mean to look at that and take it away from the limited capacity that we have, you know we have 5 staff, trying to focus on freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and human rights defenders in order to look into the positive work what is happening with the blind society, that seems to be sort of distracting looking on a small issue maybe there is a problem with progress, versus this huge deep issue that has an effect on so many levels, I mean not being able to criticise your government.

Mitchell Belfer: That's not true, I mean it is simply not true.

Michael Payne: There are so many people in prisons for Tweets that are very critical of the government.

Mitchell Belfer: No, it is not true.

Michael Payne: You see leading figures from Civil Society, or you see human rights defenders [inaudible]

Mitchell Belfer: Who? Nabeel Rajab? In 2012 he was a human rights defender and then, when at Bab Al Bahrain, he led a demonstration which led to about 20 people getting beaten up. Indians and Pakistanis being called mercs [mercenaries] spray painted on their shops and called mercenaries. That is a human rights defender? I mean people were there taking photographs of him leading a violent demonstration, a riot.

Michael Payne: So was it not heard of that someone leaves a demonstration (...)

[indicating that the victims of violence were responsible for someone attacking them]

Mitchell Belfer: There were 30 people, he [Nabeel Rajab] led 30 people and as a matter of fact I have seen it as he started screaming it and all the sudden the shops started being spray painted... that is not a human rights defender. I am sorry but you don't have the right to make somebody feel intimidated.

Michael Payne: No, I agree with you about that.

Mitchell Belfer: And the Indians and Pakistanis have been systematically targeted in the narratives that come out from any opposition groups calling them mercenaries and mercs, most of them just went for a better life and they have zero to do with any political problems. I was once walking in Bab Al Bahrain and I came across - for me as a westerner I was quite positively shocked - there is this Hindu temple and the so I rang the doorbell and come inside and the director told me that the Indian community has been there for a hundred and fifty years and he has pictures all the way going back to the beginning of the 20th century. Pictures from the compound with high walls and thick wires because they were trying as a community to stay out of this conflict between the other sectors of society because they are afraid, after being there for so long, they are afraid that they are going to get drawn into this conflict. Because basically the narrative is that they are mercenaries and anybody who is from this area just considered as mercenaries which is completely wrong.

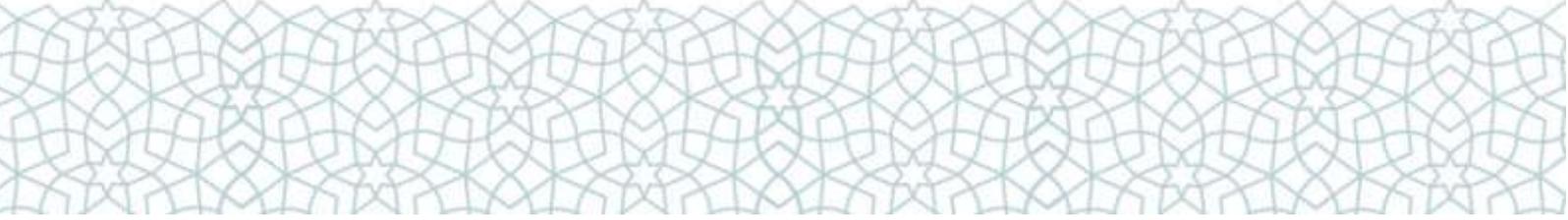
Michael Payne: Yes, it's not right and I have personally not seen all these things.

Mitchell Belfer: You have not seen documentation of people calling them mercenaries?

Michael Payne: No.

[the term has systematically appeared on the ADHRB's coalition partners documentation and Twitter feeds]

Mitchell Belfer: Do you know that in 2011 when the conflict started how many Indians and Pakistanis got killed, look at their numbers, look at the report people who got mobbed and dragged. We have pictures, my office received pictures and photographs of guys dragged into buildings by 'demonstrators' and came out with one eye missing because they got beaten up so badly. This is a story that personally I find important because nobody is even talking about it, they are being overshadowed by the regional sectarianism and things like this but what about



the Indians and Pakistanis?

Michael Payne: I'm sure they have rights just as anyone else, this is not an issue that we have a dispute on.

Mitchell Belfer: No but you also don't write about them.

Michael Payne: Like I said I haven't being on the ground as you have (...)

Mitchell Belfer: You need to have people on the ground. You know what I mean as you're walking, you are looking, you're talking to people on the ground immediately. And I go to the Bab Al Bahrain and I talk to the Pakistanis and Sri Lankans and the Nigerians (...)

Michael Payne: If you would get us in contact with some of those people we would talk and take complaints from those people as well and file them just as much as we would with any the other people, other Bahrainis... if it is a legitimate human rights abuse that is happening in Bahrain, then we want to hear about it, we want to know about it and we want to be able to address it.

Mitchell Belfer: And even if it comes from the other side of your narrative?

Michael Payne: Yes, certainly, like you said – Al Wefaq - there are certainly things that they do wrong in terms of human rights, they want to maintain reservations and they don't want to be progressive on women's rights, that is an issue.

Mitchell Belfer: They have an Ayatollah.

Michael Payne: That's a religious figure, that is not necessarily (...)

Mitchell Belfer: No, they have an Ayatollah and that Ayatollah is connected to the Ayatollah in Iran - do you know where do you get the title Ayatollah?

Michael Payne: From the religious establishment.

Mitchell Belfer: That's it, that's where you get the Ayatollah from – from Qom.

Michael Payne: Ayatollahs are religious titles.

Mitchell Belfer: Given by the Iranians. You don't get it by writing certain documents, you don't get it by preaching for some number of years, you get it because you are connected to the Ayatollah - The Ayatollah.

Michael Payne: But then what is the following of an Ayatollah?

Mitchell Belfer: What do you mean?

Michael Payne: Well, why do people [in Bahrain] choose to follow an Ayatollah?

Mitchell Belfer: Firstly, you have different sects in Shia Islam and, of course, some people follow one and some the other, the sect that is practiced ...well actually you have the [Ajam] sect in Bahrain which are relatively quite (...) they are not really participating (..) and interestingly they are more connected to Iran [historically, they are Persian by ethnicity] than the others but are deeply supportive of Bahrain's government.

But many in the Twelver sect, for example, look to Ayatollah Isa Qassim or what the Ayatollah has said. What happens when he declared – I mean, come on you are an American, you cannot live in world in which mut'ah is allowed, temporary marriage, why don't you read what he says about temporary marriage and how many people practice it on the basis of Qassim's declarations and what his mosque looks like on a Friday, go to Deraz and see what it looks like. It is a war zone. Because every martyr and every sprayed paint and everything this is not your area but this is a scary place, he is an Ayatollah. How do you have an organisation that claims to be an opposition that has an Ayatollah as its head, I mean it is an Islamic State. Iran is an Islamic Republic, they call themselves and Islamic Republic.

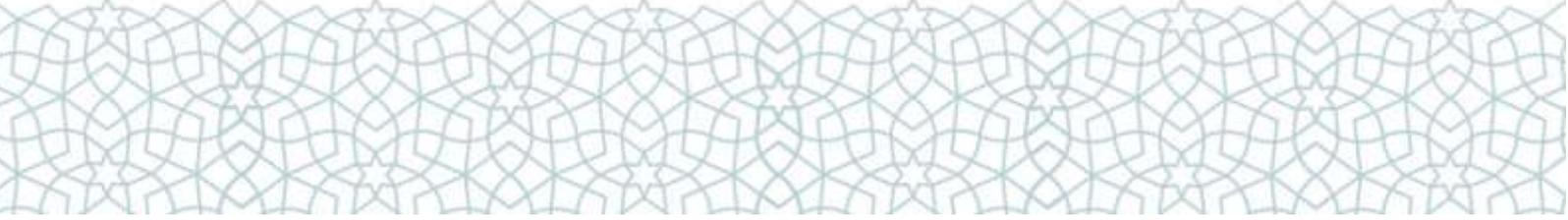
Michael Payne: What does that have to do with Al Wefaq?

Mitchell Belfer: Well, Al Wefaq is a reflection of Qassim because their leadership are religious figures.

Michael Payne: They are religiously affiliated partly, they are Al Wefaq Islamic Society, you know it from their name that is where their political bases is in the society.

Mitchell Belfer: Yes, part of their political base and the question is what happens to the other parts of the political society the more power they get? There would be greater alienation. So when you ask who is in opposition, it is not Al Wefaq. Firstly, they didn't ran in the [2014] election so that is without question. Plus, the Deputy Speaker of the House [Nuwab] is Shia, the speaker of the Shura Council is Shia, you have plenty of people. I have met an old man it is now a member of Parliament, two of his cars got burned because he left Al Wefaq and ran as an independent.

It has been recognised, at the European level, and it has been recognised here. Why is there discrimination, intimidation against anybody who ran for government in 2014 if they were once in Al Wefaq and now they left. Now my curiosity is - why people's still regard them as opposition when A) their members don't have freedom to leave without being intimidated and B) if they don't even run for government, they disqualify themselves from being an opposition and C) they have religious figures that are not representative of the state, they don't try to build a state apparatus, they're trying to build a religious apparatus. So the question is how do we outside of the Gulf - I mean in the Gulf of course nobody regards them as the opposition - but why is Europe so slow in following suit to and continues to regard them as the opposition, when clearly they are not? Why do we still call them the opposition when they have nothing that has opposition aspects? Do you know what I mean?



Michael Payne: I don't know what you mean actually.

Mitchell Belfer: They have nothing to actually qualify them for the position of political opposition.

Michael Payne: So I mean looking at it, this is just taking Al Wefaq, they were part of the parliament, winning seats in the 2010 elections, they withdrew because of the issues that were ongoing in the country at the time and they had a list of things that they wanted to see happening and none of these things were addressed for the next elections course. So for them, just as a political party, for them to come back to the table without having anything gotten through the whole time, they lost political support (...)

Mitchell Belfer: [inaudible]

Michael Payne: They were in that position regardless. They were in that position regardless if was a political calculation and whether they made the right one or the wrong one...this is the result but I think that still the organisation that represents the views of a lot of people in Bahrain.

Mitchell Belfer: I don't know, I think it is waning. Anyway (...)

Michael Payne: I think it's waning too, and I think that's what they are also struggling with ... trying mediate but trying not to concede too much but at the same time it is a rough spot for them and I think you see the rise of the people affiliated being frustrated.

Mitchell Belfer: [inaudible]

Michael Payne: Well a question just from the security side and the sectarianism that we were talking about. What do you have to say about seeing sectarian language being used in training (...) you know like Wahhabist views in the training process.

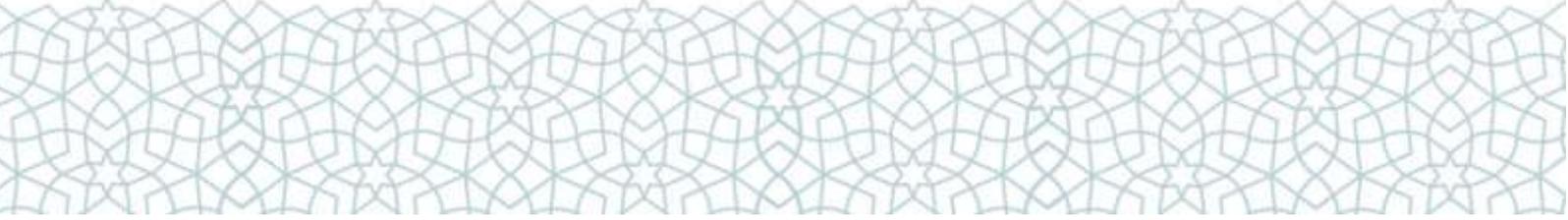
Mitchell Belfer: I really have not seen it. I mean when I say I deal with security stuff I mean like larger security stuff, like the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran or the Turkish military base in Qatar and American retrenchment out of the region and stuff like this and I haven't come across that.

Michael Payne: So, I mean, you have seen members of the Bahraini security forces to go to fight against Daesh.

Mitchell Belfer: What, two guys?

Michael Payne: There was six guys. Well anyway the fact that security services are pushing an ideological religious sectarian lines in the training, we have got copies.

Mitchell Belfer: Send me that. I have seen and know the training process. It is not sectarian. That is a false narrative developed to damage Bahrain's international integrity.



Michael Payne: We have copies of the Pdf training documents. And it is essentially about the Wahhabist ideology (...)

Mitchell Belfer: Well firstly, I have not seen it so I want to see it. Secondly how would that work for the Indians and Pakistanis who don't read Arabic. So, is there an English copy? Or is it only in Arabic?

Michael Payne: It's only in Arabic.

Mitchell Belfer: So how did they know?

Michael Payne: The Pakistanis and Indians?

Mitchell Belfer: Yeah. Because you claim that they are 80% of the armed forces, that is the majority 70% - 80% so how did they read this?

Michael Payne: [inaudible]

Mitchell Belfer: So still. I would like to know how these foreigners read Arabic. But anyways I would like to see the documents. Send it to me.

[the request for a copy of the manual was not responded to]

Michael Payne: So I guess ultimately, well I understand that you have certain questions about our organisation and stuff like that but I feel like that the things that you distributed to the European Parliament with your name on it, questioning all these things, interviews with [Inaudible]. This is the first time I have ever met you, or any of us and you have never reached to us to ask us questions.

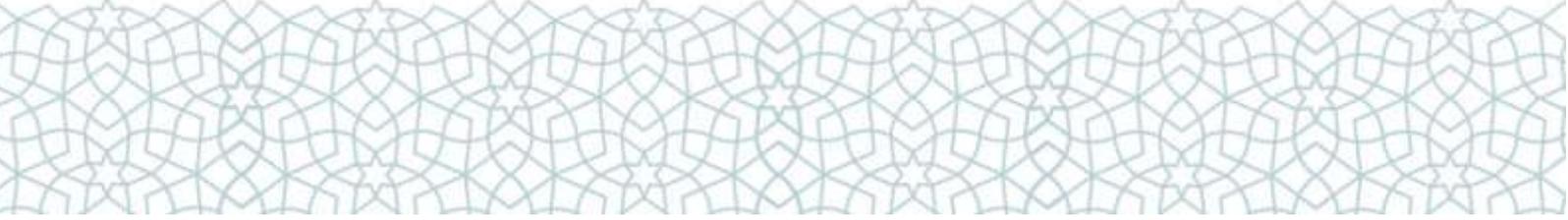
Mitchell Belfer: I don't need to. I am not in a position where I need to ask you for advice about a country that I know better than you.

Michael Payne: I am not saying that.

Mitchell Belfer: Listen I have been there. You have not.

Michael Payne: But you have concerns about who we are.

Mitchell Belfer: But I don't have concerns about who you are. I have concerns about how you project yourself and I don't need to ring you up to hear your narratives to make an opinion. And I think if you want to talk about freedom of expression, you should also be aware that you will have to stop being ambiguous and not just from my side, from many people, from magazines throughout Britain, Europe, and the United States for example - they don't take you seriously because you are ambiguous.



And if you want to show growth then your ambiguities have to go away and I'm going to keep responding to the European parliamentarians when unfair treatments not only of Bahrain but also Saudi Arabia a country which I have been only three times and I have no deep knowledge about their political systems but they also have the understanding that a country of that size and with that kind of role to play needs time in its development in stages like everywhere else on Earth. Europe - do you know when the last time Europe beheaded somebody? 1977! So we're not talking about a title shift that took place a hundred or a thousand of years ago, it was in 1977 and we are talking about [inaudible]

Michael Payne: How many executions were there?

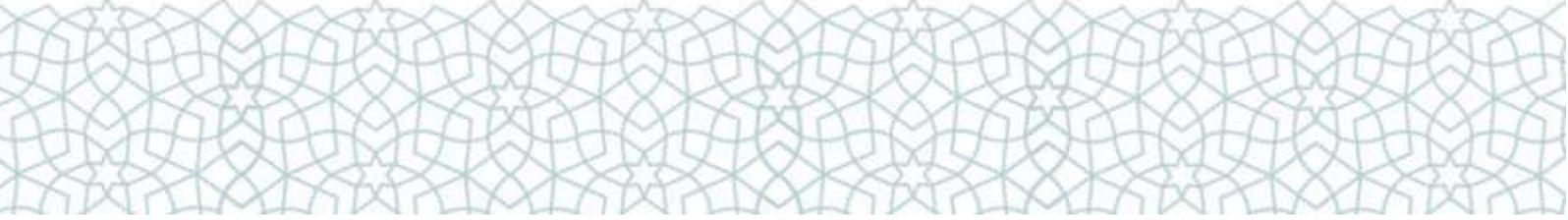
Mitchell Belfer: Two or three? But how many should have taken place? And in America how many executions do you have per year?

Michael Payne: Yes. that's an issue too. But in Saudi Arabia you see the number of beheadings rising.

Mitchell Belfer: But this story is so multi-dimensional, and so long as people just choose one area and say this is the area we want the European Union to follow, this is the area that the United Nations must follow, this is the narrative that we are going to vote on and I think it's important and fair that somebody else is there to stand up and say that that narrative is incomplete, the story is incomplete. These organisations are not telling you the full story because there are other sides to it. So for an organisation that is about Bahrain it is shocking that you have never been to the country to see whether the stories you are peddling are accurate.

Michael Payne: Why not just offer the other information that you see as incomplete rather than attacking our organisation?

Mitchell Belfer: Because from the visual is that you are putting out fake news, false information. You are an NGO focused on Bahrain, so let's focus on Bahrain and let's focus on all of Bahrain, not just the one chapter that you think is going to inspire a resolution [EU / UN] because then you are vulnerable to people to say what kind of a single agenda you are perusing? And then you are going to find yourself under these kinds of attacks. I think what the issue is, I would never raise an attack in the European Parliament about you, or any other organisation, if for example you are critical and you are supportive. Critical where it is necessary and supportive where it is visible that there is something, progress, is taking place - that's it. When you show the weaknesses and strengths of a country reforming there is no problem but when you are only critical and critical and critical and critical without showing all the dimensions of the problems then it is 1, just, you know you have a very sad programme based on someone else's agenda. You are not a human rights organisation but an NGO that is conducting a programme of hate. And that programme is not incorporating other positions and it's not open, it's a closed narrative. That's when I take issue. Develop a fairer treatment and I would never write a thing and this is why I have gone through each one of your arguments and all of the other organisations and I want to know what is happening, I want to know what people are saying. I have two people working only on monitoring...Look we can agree to disagree.



Michael Payne: Yeah, I think we do.

Mitchell Belfer: But the point is I think in the end if you are honest what we both want is the same thing which is a better, more progressive Gulf region. To do that we may have adopted different techniques and we are on different Avenues but the reality is the ultimate objective should be the same. We want a Bahrain that represents all Bahrainis. So that means also from your side, I don't mean just you but all organisations, NGOs that are focused on Bahrain to tell all the stories about the country - not just one snapshot that keeps getting sent out again and again. You know what I mean. You should tell the truth about Bahrain.

Michael Payne: If we could have information on those cases you mentioned ... and I can send you those documents.

Mitchell Belfer: Yes, thanks that would be great.

Michael Payne: Well thanks for taking the time.

*** End ***