

Bahrain Interfaith  
مركز البحرين للحوار والتسامح



**Beyond Sheikh Khalifa Bin Salman**

**Possible Scenarios &  
Potential Opportunities**

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# Beyond

## Sheikh Khalifa Bin Salman

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## Introduction

The imprisoned Secretary General of Al-Wefaq, Sheikh Ali Salman, has stated in 2013 that one of the negotiating pillars regarding the future government is to establish a “ political will that would enable “the people to elect their own government ”. It is necessary to recognize the oppositions perspective in the context of today’s discussions on the future of the Government of Bahrain, particularly due to the vague health situation of the Prime Minister, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa regardless of its negative or positive developments.

On November 20, 2019, the King of Bahrain, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, visited his 84 years old uncle, Prime Minister -Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, at the Bahrain Defense Force Hospital (Military Hospital) to follow up on his health conditions . The visit came after the absenteeism of Sheikh Khalifa from the cabinet sessions and social scene for nearly two months. His absenteeism has led to the prevalence of conflicting and contradicting speculations of the vague health

status of the oldest Prime Minister in the world (born in 1935). The official Bahrain News Agency (BNA) did not publish a picture of the visit, which was expected by citizens and observers for numerous reasons.

Many observers had wishful aspirations that the visit will reveal and uncover the actual status of the prime minister's health and would give an unclouded indication on whether the Post-Khalifa administration debates within the royal family have matured into a clear succession plan.

The prime minister left the country on the next day (21st November) on a trip that the official agency stated would be "a special trip to complete the PM's medical examinations." Sheikh Khalifa's additional absence will undoubtedly spark further speculations and ambiguous explanations of the actual situation. The official media has undoubtedly disappointed all parties due to the lack of transparency with the public, transforming the question of Sheikh Khalifa's health into a bigger one related to the future of the country and the mechanisms of consensus on the succession plan within the ruling family.

The scenarios are limited, with the exception of un-forecasted "surprises", leading to a broader change in Bahrain. Under the pressure of unregulated ambiguity, researchers and stakeholders in Bahrain have begun to circulate names and possibilities, amid news of diplomats and researchers investigating probabilities on the succession plan in the last couple of weeks. The ongoing investigation is not only focused on who succeeds the PM, but also on the competence and ability of the successor in taking "fruitful steps" in resolving the political\social crisis

and overcoming the deadlock on “national reconciliation” in the country.

My perspective today is to think positively about “possible scenarios”, and encourage researchers to brainstorm and conceptualize ideas to assist in raising the hopes of all Bahrainis in resolving the ongoing crisis in Bahrain, creating national consensus and paving the way forward for reconciliation attempts. The following candidates are some of proposed successors of the PM by numerous observers.

**Shaikh Khalid is the son of Shaikh Abdullah bin Khalid. He is married to the Kings aunt, and one of his daughters is married to (Ali) the son of the Prime Minister**



## **Sheikh Khalid bin Abdulla Al Khalifa**

Sheikh Khalid Abdullah Al Khalifa - Deputy Prime Minister (born 1944) is well placed in an administrative position (Government) and seems to be one of the most well balanced candidates within the country's ruling structure. Shaikh Khalid is the son of Shaikh Abdullah bin Khalid Al Khalifa, a religious and influential figure in the ruling family who died in 2018. He is married to the Kings aunt, and one of his daughters is married to the son of the Prime Minister, Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa. Some observers claim that the chances of Shaikh Khalid bin Abdullah are high due to his "dynamic" relationship with the king of the country, as well as being the accepted "link" with the main joints of the family, including the "khawalid house". More importantly, Sheikh Khalid may be the "best available" for the ruling family to create a "catalytic alternative" to get the coun-

try out of its suffocating crisis's since 2011.

Sheikh Khalid holds a Civil Engineering Degree and has gained competence due to his career path in the government since an early age. He has been actively involved in improving governmental services, urban planning, project management, controlling financial expenditures and managing the relationship with the legislative body, which granted him long term experience in governmental affairs and the trust of authorities to hold responsibility for numerous future governmental plans. From this perspective , some observers believe that Sheikh Khalid can produce understandings and create exits to the on-going crisis in Bahrain, and thus enable the country to enter a new stage regardless of the possibility of his appointment as the Prime Minister.



**The current PM and Sheikh Mohammed bin Mubarak were both born in 1935, which leads influential parties to believe that his age is the biggest obstacle to the likelihood of him succeeding Sheikh Khalifa**

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## **Sheikh Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Khalifa**

Sheikh Mohammed bin Mubarak is the spiritual father of modern diplomacy in Bahrain. His name is associated with the independence of Bahrain, and the stage of building the state after independence. He formulated the first foundations of the Bahraini Foreign Ministry, and was able to manage differences and create internal and external balances, without breaking the “whole jar”. Ironically, the current PM and Sheikh Mohammed bin Mubarak were both born in 1935, which leads influential parties to believe that his age is the biggest obstacle to the likelihood of him succeeding Sheikh Khalifa.

In addition to the age barrier, several observers have argued that Sheikh Mohammed bin Mubarak is cautious and vigilant to get involved in sensitive issues including the ongoing crisis due to “psychological” reasons related to the nature of his personality. Observers have also claimed that that Sheikh Mo-

ammed holds a deep desire to avoid disputes within the ruling family council, and prefers to be regarded as a man of wisdom and sophistication.

However, others claim that since the ongoing crisis in the country is draining all sides of the crisis at the expense of the country's security and stability, a well balanced and cautious politician like Sheikh Mohammed bin Mubarak is equipped to take the "final role" in managing the rhythm of the "transitional period" between the presidency of the "interim" government which he is supposed to personally assume, and a "consensual" government that is capable of facing the challenges. They believe that Sheikh Mohammed bin Mubarak is the "ideal choice" for a new stage that might assist all parties to compromise solutions, settle differences and halt all actions and choices that could apparently deepen differences, motivate disputes and create a more hostile environment.



**Some observers believe that Sheikh Ali's personality does not equip him with the aptitude required to manage intensified political disputes and propose solutions to de-escalate hostile differences**

## **Sheikh Ali bin Khalifa Al Khalifa**

Some observers argue that Sheikh Ali bin Khalifa (Deputy Prime Minister), the prime minister's son, is not a "favorite" candidate for several reasons. Their observation is driven by a claim that Sheikh Ali has no intention of filling the post of the PM and his charismatic characteristics do not meet the required leadership traits of the Prime Minister. They state that Sheikh Ali has not inherited his father's assertive management and leadership traits for he prefers working behind the "shadows" and avoids media exposure.

This reservation may be reinforced by the fact that the local media has not boosted the achievements of Sheikh Ali at a governmental level in the last two decades. They believe that Sheikh Ali's personality does not equip him with the aptitude required to manage intensified political disputes and propose solutions to de-escalate hostile differences.

However, the current political stage in Bahrain could lead

to the conceptualization of weak scenarios and unexpected outcomes and possibilities. The situation has surely not matured to the level of ending major tensions and preparing round tables for settling differences. “The positions at this current stage seem to be similar to a “postwar” phase filled with pain, grief, despair, misery and distracted fragile feelings. After more than eight years of rivalry, political positions are governed by two postwar “legacies” and narratives resulting in the absence of trust and the lack of will to re-imagine the future together.

This literally means keeping the status quo. The victims will continue to look at their aspirations, dreams, sacrifices and losses, while the other party delays the major tasks of transforming the country into an equal citizenship state and settling the requirements of justice and equity.” Those who envision the situation in accordance with this perspective might find Sheikh Ali’s compassionate personality suited for a transitional phase.



**It is “irrational”  
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## **Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa**

It is “irrational” to exclude the Crown Prince from being a possible candidate for succeeding the Prime Minister noting that some observers claim that his outreach to manage governmental affairs in the last couple of years was more prevalent than his uncle. Some observers argue that fulfilling the mandate of the Crown Prince and the Prime Minister by one person will have a negative influence on the country’s internal affairs. However, others argue that Bahrain will be able to absorb the matter without negative consequences or reactions since the “constitution” does not prohibit that and the Crown Prince and first deputy of the Prime Minister has been running the cabinet in the absence of Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman for years. This could continue without any hardship and a appointment decree could easily consolidate that.

The Crown Prince has focused on economic reforms and hastened to implement his economic policies, with the goal of

resolving the country's financial crisis. Observers hold different views of the evaluation of the role of the Crown Prince in economic reforms, but he has surely succeeded in convincing observers in his attractive leadership role in dealing with the financial crisis beyond the borders of Bahrain. This has intersected with his openness with locals including some opposition circles that share a history of negotiations and private talks with the CP.

It is no secret that many Bahrainis believe that the personal characteristics of the Crown Prince qualify him as a possible catalyst for reconciliation in Bahrain. Optimistic observers have wishful thoughts that the Crown Prince would continue the uncompleted journey taken by the Prime Minister prior to his illness in visiting Sayed Abdullah Al-Ghuraifi to discuss the ongoing crisis. Their wishful thinking leads them to believe that the man of “economic rescue” who was granted full powers to play his role could succeed in the task of “political rescue” if granted the right level of support.





**“The personal background of Sheikh Nasser does not reveal a particular desire to engage in governmental work and civil administration”**

## **Sheikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa**

Sheikh Nasser bin Hamad seems to be closer to the Supreme Defense Council. Sheikh Nasser has been gaining his influential presence in the Supreme Defense Council for years, a presence that doubled after his appointment last October as a national security adviser, his most important post to date.

The personal background of Sheikh Nasser does not reveal a particular desire to engage in governmental work and civil administration. He is young and energetic and tends to focus on supporting ‘sports and youth activities ‘ and building his military competencies.

This is reinforced by information from several sources about Sheikh Nasser’s inclination to enter the cabinet. At the end of the day, no one at home or abroad seems to be seriously suggesting the name of Sheikh Nasser for the post of Prime Minister. The military and security institutions in Bahrain deem to qualify and prepare Sheikh Naser for more important roles. It

is regrettable that the attitudes of those institution have not yet intersected with the calls for an end to internal tensions through civil and political solutions and a return to the reform project. At that stage, Sheikh Nasser bin Hamad is expected to take his own role. It's time to convince all parties that the country's current situation is as critical as the health of the Prime Minister.

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