Bahrain has been witnessing an uprising since 14 February 2011, the eruption of which had been signaled by a call on Facebook two weeks before. The call promoted two slogans: that the protests should be of a peaceful nature and that the aim is to topple the regime. Both demands were in line with their precedents in Tunisia and Egypt, and with the popular expression, “The People want the downfall of the regime” (ash-sha'b yurid isqat al-nizam). The call came from anonymous persons, but thousands of Bahrainis supported it on the Facebook group entitled “14th February Bahrain Revolution”.

The “legal” opposition, namely those oppositional political organizations that are licensed by the government, were perplexed but supported the right to peaceful protest. The non-licensed opposition groups, namely the dynamic Al-Haq Movement for Liberty and Democracy and the Al-Wafa Islamic Trend, were among those who initiated the 14th February movement. Hence, the opposition of all shades was in agreement with the uprising, despite differences on the agenda and the means of protests.

The uprising witnessed increasingly dramatic developments, which led to an unprecedented situation in the country. None of the concerned parties, neither the opposition, the security establishment, the government, nor the general public expected such a large turnout of protesters amid tight security measures. Tens of thousands showed up in defiance. Despite the peaceful nature of the protests, it was quelled with ruthless force resulting in tens of deaths and hundreds of causalities among the protesters.

Thousands occupied Lulu (Pearl) roundabout in Manama. The circle is a vital intersection of Bahrain’s roads network. It became the center of the protest activities for a month. Most the marches and demonstrations started from it or ended at it. It was eventually dubbed “Martyrs’ Roundabout”.

HM King Hamad Al Khalifa assigned his son, Crown Prince Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, to engage in a dialogue with all the relevant parties in order to achieve a political solution to the crisis. At the same time, however, the regime consolidated the National Unity Bloc (NUB), a loyal political Sunni bloc, in order to counter the opposition.

The race between a negotiated settlement and the security crackdown was accelerating amid grave risks. Three unregistered parties (Al-Haq, Al-Wafa and Al-Ahrar) raised the stakes by announcing the formation of the inter-party Alliance for the Republic. This declaration was contrary to the stance taken by the registered opposition parties, namely that the existing regime must be reformed, not ousted. The trend among the masses rapidly shifted to more radical demands. Amid this frenzied atmosphere, the squabble among the
opposition forces prevailed. The Crown Prince put forward a “last offer” to the opposition. The registered opposition did not engage in the dialogue according to the Crown Prince’s initiative. The negotiated settlement slipped away, and the security forces prevailed. On 15 March, Saudi-UAE land forces and a Kuwaiti naval force belonging to the GCC Peninsula Shield (Dera al-Jazeera) arrived in Bahrain. On the morning of 17 March, the Bahrain Defence Force and Bahrain Public Security attacked the protestors in Pearl Roundabout. On the same day a state of emergency was decreed by HM King Hamad. After the protestors were dispersed, the six-arched monument in the middle of Pearl roundabout (which is, in fact, a GCC monument) was torn down in order to erase “the bad memories” for the regime. This marked the start of a harsh clampdown on activists and the Shiite community that harbored the opposition, widening the rift between the Sunnis and Shia, and between the opposition and the regime.