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By: Abdel Fattah Madi posted on Saturday, Oct 13, 2012

An important book published a few weeks ago in Beirut by a group calling itself Qataris for Reform addresses a number of under-reported issues in their country.

#### ABOUT THIS ARTICLE

##### Summary:

A new book published by pro-reform activists calls Qatar's high proportion of foreign workers a threat to the country's identity and asks for increased government transparency, citizen involvement and democracy, Abdel Fattah Madi reports.

**Publisher:** Al-Tagheer (Yemen)

##### Original Title:

About the Book 'The People Want Reform in Qatar Also'

**Author:** Abdel Fattah Madi

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**Translated by:** Rani Geha

**Categories :**  Qatar  Security

The book is a serious and scientific call by activists who believe in raising a “collective voice for reform in Qatar” after the means of expression and dialogue through official channels was found to be inadequate. Among these activists is the renowned Qatari researcher Ali Khalifa al-Kuwari who, since March 2011, has been holding monthly meetings that have resulted in several research papers, which have been included in the book.

The book covers various topics that have to do with the constitution, the judiciary, the rule of law, population, society, culture, media, education, identity, gas exports, the environment, the declining role of the Arabic language in administration and education and other subjects. The book also criticizes Qatar's national strategy and calls for reform in light of the imbalances that resulted from the 2004 constitution.

In the book's introduction, Dr. Kuwari sums up the four obstacles to reform. They are 1) the lack of access to information related to public affairs, especially information regarding population, naturalization and public funds 2) the lack of transparency on how important decisions regarding “the country and future generations” are made, such as security agreements, education and national health care 3) the limited freedom of expression and the absence of independent civil society organizations that care about public affairs and the rights and duties of the citizens and workers and 4) the lack of clear boundaries between the public and private sectors and the mediocre public administration, which is not adequately performing its main duty of “making

sure that money, influence and public decisions are made to serve the greater good and [are taken] in light of studies and serious discussions with citizens and workers.”

The book proposes a strategy for reform that I think should be considered as part of any national strategy. Kuwari focuses on four issues.

First, there is the worsening population imbalance and the lack of a solution on the horizon. In 1970, 40% of the people living in Qatar were Qataris. In 2010, their proportion has fallen to 12%. The book rings the alarm bell about that problem, which threatens “to uproot Qatari society, obliterate its identity and culture and its Arabic language, and undermine the role of its citizens.”

The second issue is the economic imbalance caused by the high reliance on exporting oil and natural gas. The author says that this is distorting the GDP and other national measures because exporting oil and natural gas, which exist in finite amounts, does not reflect the productivity of individuals and institutions, as they do in a productive economy.

He adds that the biggest problem is the absence of a national oil policy whereby oil exports are used only for development purposes. The author also says that another problem is the lack of any boundary between public and private money and the lack of transparency, as there is no auditing of government funds.

The third issue is the absence of democracy and the imbalance in the relationship between the government and society.

“The authority is absolute and the citizens are helpless,” because the government has a monopoly on power, and so the people do not participate in the decision-making process. Civic principles are not respected and there is no constitutional court.

The author says that the imbalance should put political development at the top of the Qatari national vision and that the constitution should be amended and revised to bring about a genuine democratic transition.

The fourth issue has to do with national security and the six Gulf countries' inability to defend themselves on their own. They depend on foreign protection and alliances with powerful countries. The reason for that is their small sizes and their weakness. Each Gulf country sees that its ruling regime can best be secured by making alliances with powerful countries and by allowing them to establish local military bases.

What's more, the security issue also has to do with the inability of each country to achieve sustainable development because of their small populations and the absence of both a national will and a diversity of resources. The author argues that the only solution is to establish "among the Gulf Cooperation Council a federal and democratic entity that is able to build its own defense system and an effective foreign policy."

The book proposes five ways to correct those anomalies and stresses that Qatar needs radical and comprehensive reform because these problems threaten the very existence of society, its identity and its future.

The author says that reform has two main requirements: for the government to open the way for reform and for the citizens to participate in it.

There is also a need for the government and the people to agree what the priorities are, the stages of their implementation, and for a serious national dialogue. The author concedes that the proposals in the book are not sufficient because society has to first realize the magnitude of the imbalances and agree to reform.

The book proposes six urgent actions to start the reform process: 1) stop the population imbalance and gradually go back to the 2004 population/citizen ratio of 30% and the worker/citizen ratio to 14% within 5 years; 2) reform the public administration so that it can perform its functions and use public funds efficiently 3) revise the 2004 constitution, implement a democratic system, and elect a constituent assembly according to democratic elections 4) develop Qatar's national vision and strategy 5) confront the development imbalances in all fields by having a public debate about them and 6) make the judiciary more effective, guarantee fair trials, activate the constitutional court, empower the administrative court to look into disagreements among citizens and residents, and abolish the government's legal immunity.

The Arabs have entered a new era. They have abandoned their silence and are working to achieve their rights. In the Gulf, there are people who are calling for genuine reform and we hope that the government cooperates and understands that it is inevitable.