

# Bahrain: Car Bomb in Capital Follows Appointment of American and British Police Chiefs to Lead 'Reforms'

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*A car bomb explosion near the British embassy in Bahrain's capital, Manama, points more to a propaganda stunt by the Western-backed regime than to a "terrorist attack".*

Notably, the apparent attack in the capital's Diplomatic Area in the early hours of Sunday came the same weekend it was announced that two former police chiefs from the US and Britain were appointed by the autocratic rulers to "reform" the Persian Gulf Kingdom's security forces.

Bahrain - which has been a key Western ally since nominal independence from Britain in 1971, serving as the Persian Gulf base for the US Navy's Fifth Fleet - was the subject of discomfiting criticism last week when a high-level inquiry reported on widespread human rights violations committed by its security forces.

It seemed too good to be true when the royal-appointed human rights commission highlighted manifold violations by the regime.

Both Washington and London - the main patrons of the unelected Al Khalifa monarchy - issued statements expressing concern over the extent of crimes and abuses reported by the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI). But such reaction from the Western backers of the autocratic Sunni monarchy smacked of cloying cynicism. For it was Washington and London that gave the green light in the first place for the withering crackdown against pro-democracy protests in the oil-rich Gulf kingdom that erupted in February 2011. The crackdown escalated in March with the invasion of troops from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and continued unabated for the past eight months.

The BICI headed up by US-educated legal expert Cherif Bassiouni was apparently initiated in June by Bahrain's King Hamad Al Khalifa to "investigate allegations" of what to many observers were obvious and flagrant violations against unarmed civilians following the US/UK approved Saudi-led crackdown in Bahrain. Several international human rights groups, including Amnesty and Human Rights Watch, had already catalogued the repression in Bahrain.

So, that the BICI found evidence of "systematic abuses" and "excessive force" is no grounds for congratulating the BICI. This is the very kind of "discovery" that the most cursory, independent probe would be expected to find. That the US and Britain responded with "dismay" at the "disturbing" findings is no grounds either to believe that such reaction reflects surprised concern. How could it when these powers approved the violations in the

first place? Their admonitions to the Al Khalifa regime to “implement” recommendations by the Bassiouni inquiry for release of hundreds of detained protesters and to uphold human rights are equally hollow and cynical.

The real purpose of the BICI seems to have been to whitewash the Bahraini rulers and allow continued (hypocritical) Western support of the regime at a time when these powers are making such a “principled” stance against Syria over alleged human rights violations. Yes, the BICI did point up the (obvious) violations, but the implication from its findings are that these violations were committed by lowly ranks. Nowhere did the inquiry impugn the rulers or their Western sponsors, let alone call for prosecutions. Washington and London’s reaction, which commended King Hamad for his appointment of the inquiry, appear to dovetail neatly with this whitewash. Calling on the king to uphold its recommendations serves to legitimize the rulers as being willing, or capable of adhering to, international standards.

In the long view, what appears to be going on in Bahrain is a coordinated public relations exercise choreographed from Washington and London. The appointment of the Bassiouni inquiry at the end of June came a couple of weeks after Bahrain’s Crown Prince Salman was feted in Downing Street and the White House, where the regime announced a “national dialogue” with oppositionists. The commission of inquiry seems to have been designed as a sweetener to engage the pro-democracy movement in a political dialogue that from the outset is carefully framed to advantage the rulers, that is a dialogue that does not, cannot, pose a serious challenge to the positions of power held by the Western-backed rulers.

The appointment of two former US and British police chiefs to “oversee reforms” of Bahrain’s security forces appears to be part of this choreographed whitewash. Former Miami police commander John Timoney has been criticized in the past for heavy-handed tactics against American citizens; while John Yates was forced to resign his position in London’s Metropolitan Police in July over the Murdoch press phone-tapping scandal. Both men are hardly qualified therefore to oversee genuine reforms in Bahrain. And, indeed, their appointments can be understood as not being aimed at achieving any substantive reform, but rather merely the appearance of reform. Furthermore, the Bahraini Ministry of Interior is a creature of British policing. Between 1968-98, the head of Bahrain’s police was British Colonel Ian Henderson who oversaw the formation of a notoriously vicious force, including systematic techniques of torture and repression.

From the whitewash point of view, one flaw in the BICI report was that it clearly stated that Iran has played no role in Bahrain’s recent uprising. This finding did not surprise many observers of the Bahrain pro-democracy movement because there never was any evidence of Iranian interference. However, the finding must have disappointed the Bahraini rulers and their Western backers, both of whom have regularly sought to invoke the Iranian bogeyman as a way of discrediting what is inherently and simply an uprising for basic democratic rights for the Shia majority in Bahrain who have been disenfranchised since the Al Khalifas were installed by their British patrons 40 years ago.

This is where the latest car bombing near the British embassy in Manama comes in. No-one has pointed the finger at Iran yet. But the bombing comes at a time of rising tensions in the region between Britain and Iran over an attack on the British embassy in Tehran by protesters there, which in turn followed provocative sanctions by London in the ongoing Western campaign to target Iran.

In Bahrain, following the car bomb, the British embassy made this statement: “We are aware of an incident involving a vehicle near the British embassy in the early hours of Sunday 4 December. Police and Fire services attended. There were no casualties or injuries. We cannot confirm the cause of or responsibility for the incident. We are liaising with the [Bahraini] Ministry of Interior.”

Suspiciously, local sources say that the Diplomatic Area in Manama where the incident occurred was sealed off for several hours by the regime before the explosion.

British and American “liaison” with Bahrain’s Ministry of Interior may well result in “evidence” of Iranian involvement in the explosion. Or at the very least the incident will serve to heighten “national security” measures that will allow the Bahraini regime to suspend reforms recommended by the BICI and cynically echoed by Washington and London. In other words, another dissembling dollop of paint lashed on the choreographed whitewash of America and Britain’s key ally in the Gulf.

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Finian Cunningham has written extensively on international affairs, with articles published in several languages. Many of his recent articles appear on the renowned Canadian-based news website [Globalresearch.ca](#). He is a Master’s graduate in Agricultural Chemistry and worked as a scientific editor for the Royal Society of Chemistry, Cambridge, England, before pursuing a career in journalism. He specialises in Middle East and East Africa issues and has also given several American radio interviews as well as TV interviews on Press TV and Russia Today. Previously, he was based in Bahrain and witnessed the political upheavals in the Persian Gulf kingdom during 2011 as well as the subsequent Saudi-led brutal crackdown against pro-democracy protests.

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