

# Bahrain: Nailing the Lie in Washington's Rhetoric on "The Arab Spring"

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*US ally Bahrain continued its crackdown against popular calls for democratic rights with the illegal arrest and detention this week of prominent journalist and commentator Jaffar Al Alawy.*

To date, nearly 100 journalists, poets, bloggers and media figures have been targeted for detention by the Persian Gulf oil kingdom since pro-democracy protests erupted there last February, according to the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights. The detainees have claimed gross ill-treatment and torture while in custody - independently verified by several international human rights groups. Two respected media figures, Zakariya Al Aushayri and Karim Fakhrawi, have died during detention, their bodies showing undeniable signs of brutality.

In the latest arrest, Al Alawy was hauled into prison after security forces smashed their way into his home without a warrant. Well-known for his radio and television appearances, he is also a published poet, who has been mildly critical of the US-backed Al Khalifa regime.

Ironically, the arrest of Al Alawy followed only hours after US secretary of state Hillary Clinton claimed in a major speech in Washington that the Bahraini government "has recognized the need for dialogue, reconciliation, and concrete reforms. And they have committed to provide access to human rights groups, to allow peaceful protest".

The detention and torture of nearly 100 media figures in Bahrain is hardly a sign of "allowing peaceful protest".

Clinton's speech on US policy and the Arab Spring was spellbinding in its hypocrisy and sophistry. She glorified the US-backed illegal war to overthrow Libya's Muammar Gaddafi and denounced Syria for its "brutal" crackdown on protests. Syrian President Bashar Al Asad, warned Clinton, "must step down; and until he does, America and the international community will continue to increase pressure on him and his brutal regime".

There were no such bristling sanctions for Washington's ally in Bahrain, where the US Fifth Fleet is based. Indeed, the US government recently signed a military arms deal worth \$53 million with the Al Khalifa monarchy.

Yet on many counts, Bahrain's human rights violations put it way out in front for urgent international sanctions against its rulers. In Syria, the death toll from violence is estimated at 3,500. But perhaps a third of this total are casualties among the state forces which are combating in some cases an armed insurrection supplied by Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Israel

(with obviously US oversight).

By contrast in Bahrain, protesters are unarmed and have invariably conducted peaceful demonstrations of civic disobedience. Proportionate to their populations, Bahrain's death toll of civilians is easily comparable to that of Syria's. Furthermore, the persecution of dissenting public voices is equivalent to 3,660 journalists being detained; the figure for the detention of all protesters since February rising to 55,000.

Among those hauled into Bahraini prisons, tortured and sentenced are doctors and nurses who did nothing more than treat civilians injured by American-equipped and Saudi-backed state forces. The proportionate figure for these medics subjected to crimes against humanity amounts to over 3,300.

On so many measures therefore, Bahrain is a clear case of outrageous human rights violations and atrocities that deserves urgent international intervention. But Washington is not only tolerating these crimes, it is actively supporting them while doing its rhetorical best to conceal.

The British and Canadian governments are also complicit in this US hypocrisy and twisted manipulation of international law. The former is another major supplier of military weapons that can have no other purpose than internal repression; meanwhile Ottawa maintains a stoic silence over the illegal detention, torture and sentencing of Canadian citizen Naser Al Raas. Al Raas was arrested while trying to leave Bahrain after visiting his family and fiancée during March.

He was tortured during illegal detention in the notorious Ministry of Interior headquarters in the capital, Manama. Al Raas told Global Research that he believes the reason why he is now facing a five-year sentence for allegedly participating in "illegal public protests" was because he happened to be held in a cell adjacent to the journalist Karim Kakhrawi. During the 12 days that Fakhrawi was tortured to death, Al Raas heard the screams from his companion prisoner, whose identity he later found out. And he can recall the horrible moment when the screams suddenly stopped. For this reason, Al Raas believes the Bahraini regime wants to suppress his potential testimony to a damning state killing.

Helping the Bahraini regime do its dirty work are the governments of the US, Britain and Canada, which otherwise take every opportunity to moralise, sanction and militarily attack any state that they happen to disprove of.

In her speech at the National Democratic Institute in Washington, Clinton said: "Americans believe that the desire for dignity and self-determination is universal—and we do try to act on that belief around the world. Americans have fought and died for these ideals. And when freedom gains ground anywhere, Americans are inspired."

In fending off criticism of "inconsistent" US policy on the Arab Spring, Clinton let the cat out of the bag when she referred to "close allies" Bahrain and Saudi Arabia and the need to "a secure supply of energy". She added pointedly: "There will be times when not all our interests align... that is just reality."

Other realities could be mentioned for why the US and its allies are participating in arresting and torturing citizens calling for democracy in Bahrain – such as the fear that the long-overdue franchise for the Shia majority in the Persian Gulf state would boost Iran's regional

role and give the Islamic Republic a degree of respite from Washington's recently cranked-up campaign to lynch the government in Tehran.

But the bottom-line and truly remarkable reality that Clinton did not mention - which Bahrain clearly demonstrates - is this: Washington stands implacably against democratic progress in the Middle East. Its highly selective invocation of democratic rights and freedoms is nothing but a cynical, self-serving lie.

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### **About the author:**

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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