

Bahrain Regime Finances Britain's Officer Training Academy

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Sandhurst took £3m Bahrain gift after regime's crackdown

by [Simon Murphy and Martin Williams](#)

 *Sandhurst recruits are about to get a new sports facility thanks to the King of Bahrain.*

Britain's world-famous officer training school, Sandhurst, has accepted a £3m donation from the King of Bahrain, despite global criticism of the regime following a brutal crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators last year.

Documents obtained by the Bureau reveal the top military training establishment was in negotiations with the regime about the donation throughout 2011. It received the money in January 2012 and sent a gushing letter thanking the King of Bahrain for his generosity at the beginning of summer.

The academy, which is responsible for training British Army officers, is using the donation to build a sports hall which is due to open early next year. It will be named in the country's honour.

The donation is part of a long-standing relationship between the Bahraini royal family and Sandhurst. The King, Hamad bin Essa Al Khalifa, was trained at the Surrey-based academy, as are a select group of Bahraini military personnel each year.

'It is disgraceful that the British government should allow the King of Bahrain to fund Sandhurst'

Jeremy Corbyn MP

The King has also been a patron of the Sandhurst Foundation, the academy's alumni charity, since 2007. He twice donated a fee of £69,975 to the Foundation in 2011 and 2012.

The Sunni regime, which rules over the Shia majority, was criticised after the Saudi National Guard were deployed to crush pro-democracy protests that started in February 2011, sparked by the Arab Spring movement. Hospital staff were arrested for helping protestors and many are still on trial.

Jeremy Corbyn MP condemned the decision to accept the donations.

'Bahrain has an appalling human rights record and even now medical practitioners are on trial for helping victims,' he said.



Bahrain protests / Al Jazeera English

'It is disgraceful that the British government should allow the King of Bahrain to fund Sandhurst and it seems there is a completely different set of standards on human rights relating to Bahrain, compared to many other states in the Gulf and Middle East region.'

The MoD has provided training for 77 Bahraini military personnel at Sandhurst since 1992, including three last year, and 39 in the past decade, according to a response to a Freedom of Information request.

An MoD spokesman told the Bureau that although the training costs the government £78,000 per recruit, Bahrain only pays £48,400, meaning the government subsidises training costs to the tune of £29,600 in each case. Figures suggest this will have cost the MoD £384,800 in the past three years alone.

An MoD spokesman argued that the subsidies were beneficial to Britain as they 'help them [Bahraini military personnel] see how we do things,' - a practice dating back to 1947.

The recruits undergo a 48-week Army Commissioning Course, which the MoD says gives 'a grounding in British Military doctrine' and teaches 'to think and communicate as commanders and to foster a deep interest and care for the individual'.

Bahrain sports hall

In the correspondence obtained by the Bureau, Major General Patrick Marriott, a trustee of the Sandhurst Foundation, thanked the Bahraini monarch. 'His Majesty's very generous donation to the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst has been received and with much gratitude. I would be most grateful if you would please convey my humble duty and my sincerest thanks to His Majesty for providing these funds for supporting the development of a modern multi purpose Sports Hall,' he wrote on May 24, 2012.

The letter, addressed to the King of Bahrain's second son, Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad bin Essa Al Khalifa, who is Chief of the Royal Court, explains that building work is due to 'commence imminently and if it pleases your Excellency, I will keep you updated on a regular basis'.

His Majesty's very generous donation to the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst has been received and with much gratitude. I would be most grateful if you would please convey my humble duty and my sincerest thanks to His Majesty for providing these funds...

Major General Patrick Marriott, Royal Military Academy Sandhurst

The donation, which was received on January 18, 2012, had initially been offered more than a year previously.

In a letter dated February 1, 2011 addressed to Major General Marriott, the Sheikh confirmed the £3m donation, after an initial £100,000 for design work, asking for 'the cash flow for the remaining balance'.

Just 14 days later violence broke out in Bahrain's capital, Manama, as 14 protesters were injured and one killed by government security forces, who used tear gas and rubber bullets to break up demonstrations.

The protests continued into March, with Saudi Arabia controversially deploying 1,000 troops to quell them. Up to 50 people have reportedly been killed to date during protests.



A Bahraini protestor critically injured after police reportedly opened fire on demonstration on February 18. Image: Al Jazeera

Sandhurst did not immediately reply to the Sheikh's request for instructions on where to deposit the remaining funds. On October 1, 2011 - more than eight months later - the Sheikh wrote to Major General Marriott expressing concern 'that we have not as yet received a reply' to the previous letter.

Major General Marriott finally responded on November 8, 2011, writing: 'Please accept my sincerest apologies for not replying to your previous letter. I was waiting for clarification on the total costs of the project.' He included the bank details for the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in the letter, asking the Sheikh to pay the remaining balance, noting that the anticipated completion date would be December 2012.

However, in later correspondence, Major General Marriott moved the initial completion date back to March 2013. He also added: 'With regards to signage; my team is working with the architects to design a suitable commemorative plaque which meets the needs of the Royal Military Academy and His Majesty.'

When asked whether Major General Marriott's delay in response to the Sheikh was because of turmoil inside Bahrain, an MoD spokesman said it was not, reiterating the Major General's claim about waiting for clarification on the project's total costs.

A 'significant' donation

Andy Slaughter MP, chair of the all-party parliamentary group for Bahrain, said it was 'significant' that the £3m donation was to Sandhurst itself, rather than its charitable wing, the Sandhurst Foundation.

'The government's response on questioning has been almost entirely uncritical of what Bahrain is doing. For a country the size of Bahrain [the island's population is 1.3m], which is very small indeed, the number of deaths, injured and those imprisoned, victimised and dismissed is highly significant.

The government's attitude to Bahrain is completely different to the rest of the Arab Spring, and if anything, over the last six months, it's moved far more sycophantic to the regime than before.

Andy Slaughter MP, chair of the all-party parliamentary group for Bahrain

'The point is, they haven't really done anything about it. It's all PR, about presenting an acceptable face.'

Close ties

An MoD spokesman explained that the British military has a long tradition of ‘integrating overseas personnel who have been selected for officer training and we have no wish to discontinue this practice.’

He added: ‘Sandhurst receives about one donation every five years, in addition to charitable gifts from a wide range of organisations and individuals. All donations are in compliance with the UK’s domestic and international legal obligations and our values as a nation.’

‘All overseas requests for defence training are considered on a case-by-case basis and it would not be provided if we thought such training would lead to human rights abuses. Providing defence training and education to overseas cadets at the same high standards used by UK armed forces helps to save lives and raise awareness of human rights.’

‘It also helps build stability overseas as part of the government’s wider foreign policy goals.’

The Bahrain authorities have said that Hamad set up an independent commission to examine any allegations of abuse last year.

Ties that bind

The King of Bahrain’s £3m donation to Sandhurst is part of a longstanding ‘relationship of patronage and favours’, according to a leading academic who fled the country during the uprising.

Professor Mike Diboll, who now works at the University of Sussex, worked in Bahrain for four years until the violence broke out.

‘This is about retaining that reciprocal favours relationship between the Bahraini monarchy and strains within the British establishment,’ he said.

Although Britain recognised the independence of Bahrain in 1913, it remained under British administration until full independence was declared in 1971.

Dr Kristian Coates-Ulrichsen, a research fellow specialising in the Gulf states, at the London School of Economics and Political Science said he found the donation to Sandhurst ‘astonishing’.

‘The stuff that’s happened over the past 18 months should have persuaded everyone in the UK government and armed forces that the credibility of the Bahraini government’s claims to be reforming is, pretty much, zero,’ he said.

‘The leader of the opposition, who I met recently, was shot at in June – he was targeted deliberately. We’ve had people being continually arrested, we’ve had the closure of another political party and this is on-going.’

But he said the Bahrain’s relationship with Sandhurst ‘fits into a much wider pattern of British officers providing the backbone of Bahrain’s security forces.’

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