

# Bahrain: Western Complicity in Saudi-Backed War Crimes

Civilian Killings, Disappearances, Torture, Chemical Warfare and Organ Theft...

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*Claims of Civilian Killings, Disappearances, Torture, Chemical Warfare Agents and Organ Theft From Victims of State Violence*

When Saudi-led military forces intervened in Bahrain on March 14, it was declared by the Bahraini government and its allies among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and the United Arab Emirates that the unprecedented move was a matter of urgency, needed to “restore order and stability” to the tiny Persian Gulf island kingdom. An arcane GCC defence pact was invoked – the Arabian Peninsula Shield – even though legal experts pointed out that such a provision was only applicable in the event of one of the six Gulf states coming under attack from an external enemy.

Three weeks later, the real nature of the Saudi-led intervention is becoming brutally clear. It can now be seen as an invasion that has led to foreign occupation, lawlessness and several categories of crimes against humanity committed by the very forces purported to bring order. In one sense, the rhetorical justification for invoking the Peninsula Shield force, “to restore order and stability”, is literally correct. The aim was to restore the order and stability of the US-backed Al Khalifa Sunni dictatorship that had sat perilously on top of an oppressed Shia majority for decades. On February 14, the Shia majority (60-70 per cent of the indigenous population) along with disenfranchised Sunni and non-religionists from working class communities rose up in numbers that had never been seen before. Inspired by revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab region, Bahrain’s surging pro-democracy movement rocked the royal rulers.

Bahrain’s indigenous population is estimated at 700,000. Official figures are hard to come by because of the demographic sensitivity of the island’s Sunni ruling elite. So when daily demonstrations of up 200,000-300,000 people were flooding main roads and highways, temporarily disabling government institutions and centres of commerce – and with crowds shouting with increasing boldness “Down, down [King] Hamad” – there was a palpable sense that the regime was facing a serious existential threat. No matter that the protest movement was based on peaceful civil disobedience, the threat to the status quo had reached an unbearable threshold, from the point of view of the regime and its regional and Western backers.

During the four weeks of democracy-euphoria sweeping Bahrain, the Gulf leaders were in constant communication under the aegis of the GCC with its headquarters in the Saudi capital, Riyadh. Even when Bahrain’s rulers ordered a massacre of seven civilians during the first week of protests, the foreign ministers of the GCC defied an international outcry and

rallied in staunch support of their ally in Manama. Evidently, the shaky foundations of the House of Al Khalifa were undermining the House of Al Saud and the other sheikhdoms of the Gulf, as witnessed by the beginnings of civil unrest in Saudi's oil-rich Eastern Province and Oman. If Bahrain were to succumb to democracy, as its people were demanding, the domino effect on the rigid, autocratic power structure across the Gulf would have revolutionary repercussions.

### **Enter the US and Britain**

The threat of democracy in the Gulf is not just a concern to regional despots fighting to maintain their anachronistic privileges over the mass of impoverished people. The threat to autocratic rule in the Gulf goes to the heart of global power domination by Western capitalist governments and their imperialist control of resources and nations. The continued flow of oil from the earth's largest proven reserves of hydrocarbons, and perhaps more importantly the continued flow of petrodollars from the Gulf puppet states to buy Western treasury bonds and thus prop up debt-crippled economies, are hugely vital interests. Reflecting this dependence on maintaining the autocratic Gulf status quo, the Western governments every year sell billions of dollars worth of weaponry to the dictatorial regimes – weapons that are used mainly to suppress their own people from seeking democracy.

It is worth thinking about that for a while. Western governments, despite lofty rhetoric and platitudes about democracy and human rights, are, under the operation of the capitalist order, in direct conflict with such values. This fundamental contradiction of Western powers can of course be seen right across the Middle East and North Africa, having backed dictators in Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, Yemen, and until recently Libya under Muammar Gaddafi. But the Gulf's primary oil riches and its strategic location from which Western powers are able to launch wars of aggression to control the vast energy resources of Central Asia, including the checking of Iran, makes the Persian Gulf region a particularly inviolate vital interest.

Just when the Gulf rulers were reaching their threshold of intolerance towards the democracy movement in Bahrain, the US defence secretary Robert Gates made an unscheduled over night visit to Bahrain's King Hamad Al Khalifa on March 11-12. Only days before, Britain's top national security advisor, Sir Peter Ricketts, also had a closed meeting with the Bahraini monarch conveying, it was reported, "a special message" from UK prime minister David Cameron.

Two days after Gates left the Bahraini royal household, on March 14, several thousands-strong armed forces entered Bahrain across the 25-kilometre causeway connecting Saudi Arabia. Two days after that again, on March 16, Bahrain's rulers declared martial law, beginning with a full military attack on peaceful, pro-democracy protesters camped at the capital's Pearl Square.

As Middle East analyst Ralph Schoenman points out: "This level of coordination does not result in full-scale invasion 48 hours later by virtual puppet regimes without taking their cues and instruction from their military suppliers and political overseers."

Pointing to the strategic importance of Bahrain, where the US Fifth Fleet is based, Schoenman added: "Bahrain is the linchpin of imperial control of the entire region and, indeed of global capitalist 'stability' through hegemony over oil and seething populations chafing under the heel of feudal, autocratic, semi-colonial and country-selling regimes."

That the US government must have given a green light to the Saudi-led invasion and ongoing repression in Bahrain is corroborated by Pepe Escobar in Asia Times on April 2. He writes: “Two diplomatic sources at the United Nations independently confirmed that Washington, via secretary of state Hillary Clinton, gave the go-ahead for Saudi Arabia to invade Bahrain and crush the pro-democracy movement in their neighbor in exchange for a ‘yes’ vote by the Arab League for a no-fly zone over Libya – the main rationale that led to United Nations Security Council resolution 1973. [1]

On the morning of March 16, around 5.30am, Bahrain’s mobile telecommunication networks were abruptly shut down. Minutes later, members of the Bahraini Defence Forces and police, supported by Saudi-led GCC troops, fired on civilians with machineguns, tanks and US-made Cobra helicopter gunships.

One of those killed, Jaffar Maioof, from A’ali village, was shot in the back and the legs. Thirty-two-year-old Jaffar had been earlier entreating the armed soldiers who came to crush the pro-democracy movement camped for nearly a month at the Pearl Square.

“We only want peace and democracy,” Jaffar told the soldiers of the Peninsula Shield. “The rights we are fighting for are rights for you too... the right to vote, to work, to have a good house, health and education.”

The soldiers didn’t want to listen, recalled Jaffar’s cousin, Abdullah, who was with him on that fatal morning.

“They starting firing machineguns from helicopters and tanks,” said Abdullah. “Jaffar was hit in the back and then in the legs. He fell to the ground, but we couldn’t help him because the soldiers were firing at us and they wouldn’t let an ambulance near Jaffar. They shot at the tyres of one ambulance vehicle that tried to reach my cousin.”

The total number of dead civilians since the February 14 uprising in Bahrain is estimated between 25 and 30. It is hard to put an exact figure on the numbers murdered on March 16 and subsequently because of the second violation of international law committed by the Peninsula Shield forces – the immediate targeting of hospitals, medics and the injured in the hospitals.

The prime target was Salmaniya Medical Centre, Bahrain’s biggest public hospital and only a few kilometers from Pearl Square, which had defied ministerial orders in previous weeks to keep its doors open to treat the thousands injured by state violence involving shotguns, high-velocity weapons, tear gas, and rubber bullets fired at point-blank range.

Several of the doctors and nurses at Salmaniya were physically abused when the military attacked the hospital – crimes against humanity on two counts. One senior consultant, Dr Ali Al-Ekri, was arrested while he was conducting surgery. His whereabouts remain unknown. In total, nine doctors and senior nursing staff have been unlawfully detained, accused of being “disloyal” by the regime simply because they adhered to medical ethics to treat dying and injured protesters.

### **Injured among up to 400 missing**

Added to the detained medics, it is estimated by human rights groups that between 200 and 400 injured patients were and continue to be detained by military forces that commandeered Salmaniya and all other public hospitals following the crackdown on March 16.

A spokeswoman for US-based Human Rights Watch said: "We are deeply alarmed by the number of disappeared. And we are even more concerned by the number of people who had been reported missing and who are now being found dead. There seems to be a blatant campaign to silence people by fear," she added.

In recent days, at least four people have been reported dead after they went missing during the military crackdown. One of them was named as Abdulrazul Al Hujairi (38), from Burri village. He worked as a cleaner at Salmaniya Hospital in Manama and was taken into custody on March 19, according to witnesses. His badly beaten body, including a broken neck, was found the next day near the remote oil fields of Awaali. (His body also bore evidence of deep surgery on his torso - unrelated to the cause of death. See more on this below).

The father of another man Hani Abdulaziz (32), from Belad Al Qadeem, west of Manama, described how he saw his badly injured son being taken away by military police while he was being treated at the International Hospital on March 19. Abdulaziz is believed to have been tortured after he was snatched by a police squad earlier that day. [2] He was taken to a nearby construction site and shot in the legs and arms, said witnesses. The bare concrete room where he is said to have been shot four times at close range bore the evidence of massive blood loss. His father said subsequent inquiries with the police failed to produce any information on the whereabouts of his son. His body was eventually released five days later - the same day he was buried. Abdulaziz's family rejected the official death certificate, which claimed that he was killed in a car accident.

### **Chemical warfare agents cleared by Washington?**

Another violation of international law concerns the alleged use of chemical warfare agents by the Peninsula Shield forces.

One Bahraini senior consultant said: "We are sure that nerve agents are being used against protesters. Hundreds of people have been treated for severe symptoms of nerve poisoning that are quite distinct from exposure to teargas."

This diagnosis of nerve gas poisoning was verified independently by other senior doctors. One toxicologist said: "I am 100 per cent sure that these people were suffering from nerve gas poisoning. All the symptoms match those of poisoning with organophosphate chemicals that are used as chemical warfare weapons."

The toxicologist went on to explain that the effects of teargas are relatively mild and shortlived, causing coughing and streaming of eyes for 15-60 minutes. However, the medic noted: "People were being brought into the hospitals suffering from unconsciousness, severe convulsions, spasms in their hands and limbs, memory loss, vomiting, the loss of voluntary muscle function, leading to urination and diarrhea. These symptoms match closely those of poisoning with organophosphate neurotoxins. Furthermore, we treated people with the drug, atropine, which is an antidote specific to this organophosphate toxicology."

It should be pointed out that the use of such nerve agents is illegal under the 1993 UN Convention against Chemical weapons, to which the Bahrain state and its Western allies are signatories. It should also be noted that the same toxicology and claims of neuro toxins being deployed against civilian protesters have been reported in the US-backed Yemeni regime. That such a grave violation of international law was conducted contemporaneously

by two US-backed regimes strongly suggests that these states were given clearance from Washington.

### **Claims of organ theft**

To the catalogue of crimes against humanity committed by the Peninsula Shield forces are allegations that the bodies of victims of state violence are being used to harvest organs. According to pro-democracy sources, as many as 17 bodies of victims released from military custody show signs of deep surgery from the neck to the abdomen. One of those cases is that of Abdulrazul Al Hujairi, mentioned above.

Another case is that of 15-year-old Sayed Ahmed Saeed Shams, who was shot dead on the night of March 30 in a drive-by shooting by police, say witnesses. The youth was killed by a single bullet entry above the left eye. When his body was returned to the family for burial the next day, the entire upper body had been subjected to deep surgery – surgery that was unrelated to the cause of death. This and several other cases of inexplicable surgery on victims of state violence are fuelling claims of illegal organ theft, claims that at least deserve an international independent inquiry.

Finally, it should be noted that while the US and other Western powers have mounted robust military and diplomatic intervention in Libya in the name of “humanitarian concern”, no such action has been taken for protection of civilians in Bahrain despite clear evidence of multiple violations under international law and notwithstanding the fact that thousands of US military personnel are stationed only kilometers from the scenes of appalling violence. Despite condemnations from the UN’s Human Rights Commissioner and rights groups such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty, Western governments have conspicuously failed to voice unequivocal concern to halt the ongoing repression against unarmed civilians in Bahrain. This is not just a case of hypocrisy and double standards. It points to Western government complicity at the highest level in crimes against humanity. And the glaring Western contradiction between Bahrain and Libya also shows the much-vaunted

Western humanitarian concern in Libya as being nothing but a cynical cover for ulterior motives.

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### **Notes**

[1] [http://atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/MD02Ak01.html](http://atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/MD02Ak01.html)

[2]

[http://www.youtube.com/verify\\_controversy?next\\_url=http%3A//www.youtube.com/watch%3Fv%3DLzj0UsLrwQE](http://www.youtube.com/verify_controversy?next_url=http%3A//www.youtube.com/watch%3Fv%3DLzj0UsLrwQE)

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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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