

# The myth of humanitarian intervention

Libya, Bahrain, Yemen

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What is the U.S. doing to protect these civilians? Wounded protesters being treated in Sana'a, Yemen, March 18.

On March 19, the eighth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, U.S., British and French planes began bombing Libya, launching a new war against yet another Arab country. Two days earlier the U.N. Security Council, under intense pressure from the U.S. and its allies, had voted for Resolution 1973. Res. 1973 called for taking “all necessary measures,” supposedly to “protect [Libyan] civilians and meet their basic needs.” The real U.S. aim was immediately made clear by Pres. Obama and Secretary of State Clinton—regime change in Libya.

The day after the Security Council vote, March 18, armed forces of Ali Abdullah Saleh's government in Yemen carried out a massacre. The massacre took place in broad daylight at the central square in Sana'a, Yemen's capital. At least 52 people were killed and more than 200 wounded, most by snipers firing from atop government buildings. Despite the use of live ammunition by snipers, tens of thousands of demonstrators who have been demanding the ouster of the U.S.-backed Saleh regime for several weeks courageously refused to back down.

What was the reaction of the U.S. government to the March 18 massacre? Clinton disingenuously stated: “The U.S. government “is alarmed by today's violence in Sana'a against anti-government protesters and is *seeking to verify reports that this is the result of actions by security forces...*We call on Yemeni security forces to exercise maximum restraint, refrain from violence, and permit citizens to freely and peacefully express their views.” Translation: *If* the security forces did carry out the massacre (as if that was really in question), Clinton urged them to show “maximum restraint” in the future.

No calls from Washington for a U.N.-imposed “no-fly zone,” or the bombing of Saleh's military. Not even a whisper from Washington about sanctions.

On the contrary, U.S. military and other aid has continued to flow unimpeded to Saleh and his army.

On March 16, the government of Bahrain, with the assistance of 2,000 invading Saudi troops and hundreds of United Arab Emirates security forces, dispersed the mass protests in the capital Manama and elsewhere. The governments of all three countries are hereditary monarchies and police states, long subservient to U.S. and British imperialism. The U.S. Fifth

Fleet, a key element in U.S. strategy of domination of the entire Persian/Arabian Gulf region, is based in Bahrain.

According to a White House statement, Pres. Obama called the client kings, Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and Hamad al-Khalifa of Bahrain, to express, in the blandest possible terms, his “deep concern over the violence in Bahrain and stressed the need for maximum restraint, “ and also “stressed the importance of a political process as the only way to peacefully address the legitimate grievances of Bahrainis and to lead to a Bahrain that is stable, just, more unified and responsive to its people.”

As in the case of Yemen, no threats of military intervention, sanctions or anything at all in the face of a blatant invasion and brutal repression. More than 20 Bahrainis have been killed and hundreds wounded, out of a total population of just over a million, over the past month.

What explains Washington’s mild response to developments in Yemen and Bahrain, while it was at the same time launching a new war against Libya?

The answer is that while the Qaddafi government in Libya has, under pressure, made many concessions to imperialism and opened the country’s economy in recent years, it is not a client regime. After hedging its bets in the initial stages of the Libyan conflict, the Obama administration decided to rescue the opposition, which was facing imminent defeat.

This decision had nothing to do with the claimed reasons: democracy, human rights, civilian suffering, and so on. The leaders in Washington, Democrats as well as Republicans, have proven over many decades their willingness to not only tolerate but promote—and in numerous cases create—the most repressive and vicious regimes in the world.

Take Saudi Arabia, for example. The British and U.S. armed and funded one extended family, the al-Sauds, in their drive to conquer most of the Arabian Peninsula. The country was founded in 1932, and its name literally means the Arabia of the al-Saud family. Today it is ruled by 2,000 princes. There has never been an election in the country’s history, women are denied the right even to drive cars, and the slightest sign of political dissent is met with torture, imprisonment and often execution. But in Washington and the corporate media here, Saudi Arabia is treated as a “moderate” and friendly state.

The fact is, Saudi Arabia holds over 25 percent of the world’s known oil reserves, and while the royal family has grown very rich, U.S. oil companies, banks and the military-industrial corporations—the core of U.S. ruling class power—have reaped even greater wealth.

What moved the Obama administration to action on March 19 was the realization that the leaders of the Libyan opposition, who pleaded loudly for imperialist intervention, would better serve these same powerful interests if they were to become the new government of Libya. The president and his advisers do not share the same view about the opposition movements in Yemen or Bahrain. They see the movements in both of the latter countries as potentially threatening to the U.S. Empire, thus the mealy-mouthed statements of “concern.”

But while the U.S. is the most powerful military state in the world, it is not all-powerful. Despite Washington’s overt and covert support for the regimes in Yemen and Bahrain, the popular movements there have not been defeated.

In Yemen, there has been a major split in the military, with one faction now providing

protection to the protests, which continue to demand the ouster of Saleh. In Bahrain, the movement defied the regime's security and the occupation troops and returned to the streets in massive numbers on March 25.

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