

U.S. Support for Repression and Dictatorship: Do We Care About People If They Live in Bahrain?

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I had a heck of a time making sense of the U.S. Navy's new motto "A Global Force for Good" until I realized that it meant "We are a global force, and wherever we go we're never leaving."

For three years now people in the little island nation of Bahrain have been nonviolently protesting and demanding democratic reforms.

For three years now the king of Bahrain and his royal thugs have been shooting, kidnapping, torturing, imprisoning, and terrorizing nonviolent opponents. An opponent includes anyone speaking up for human rights or even "insulting" the king or his flag, which carries a sentence of 7 years in prison and a hefty fine.

For three years now, Saudi Arabia has been aiding the King of Bahrain in his crackdown on the people of Bahrain. A U.S. police chief named John Timoney, with a reputation for brutality earned in Miami and Philadelphia, was hired to help the Bahraini government intimidate and brutalize its population.

For three years now, the U.S. government has been tolerating the abuses committed by Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, continuing to sell weapons to Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, and continuing to dock the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet in Bahrain. In fact, the U.S. military has recently announced big and pricey plans to expand its bases in Bahrain and add more ships.

For three years now, the U.S. government has continued to dump some \$150 billion (with a 'B') each year into the U.S. Navy, a large portion of which goes for the maintenance of the Fifth Fleet in Bahrain. Withdrawing and disbanding that fleet would save that gargantuan expense. Retraining and re-employing in peaceful activities all personnel would cost a fraction of \$150 billion. Providing aid to nonviolent pro-democracy activists in Bahrain would cost a tiny fraction of a fraction. Establishing a policy in the case of this one country of supporting human rights over brutal dictatorship would be, as they say, *priceless*. It would create a very useful model for a transformation of U.S. policy in numerous other nations as well.

Accurate and timely information about the horrors underway for the past three years in Bahrain are available [online](#), via Western human rights groups, and via small back-page stories in U.S. newspapers. There's little dispute over the general facts. Yet, there's little outrage. There appears to have been no polling done of the U.S. public on the topic of Bahrain whatsoever, so it's impossible to know what people think. But my impression is that most people have never heard of the place.

The U.S. government is not shouting about the need to bomb Bahrain to protect its people. Senators are not insisting on sanctions, sanctions, and more sanctions. There seems to be no crisis, no need for “intervention,” only the need to end an intervention we aren’t told about.

Which raises a tough question for people who give a damn. We’re able to reject a war on Iran or Syria when the question is raised on our televisions. But we can’t seem to stop drone strikes nobody tells us about. How do we create a question nobody is asking, about a topic nobody has heard of, and then answer it humanely and wisely? And how do we overcome the inevitable pretense that the Fifth Fleet serves some useful purpose, and that this purpose justifies a little teargas, a bit of torture, and some murders here and there?

The Fifth Fleet [claims to be responsible](#) for these nations: Afghanistan, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, and Yemen. None of these nations have ships in U.S. waters claiming to be responsible for it. None of these nations’ peoples have indicated majority support for having the Fifth Fleet be responsible for them. Afghanistan has suffered under U.S. occupation for over a decade, with chaos and tyranny to follow. Egypt’s thugs are rising anew with steady U.S. support, money, and weaponry. Iran has threatened and attacked no other nation for centuries, has never had a nuclear weapons program, spends less than 1% what the U.S. does on its military, and moves away from democracy with every U.S. threat. Why not leave Iran alone? Iraq, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and others of these nations, including Bahrain, suffer under the rule of U.S.-backed governments. One might reasonably add Israel and the lands it occupies to the list, even if the Navy cannot bring itself to mention them. Yemen and Pakistan suffer under the constant buzzing and missile launching of U.S. drones, which are creating far more enemies than they kill. In fact, not a single nation falling under the past 19 years of benevolent “responsibility” of the Fifth Fleet has clearly benefitted in any way.

At a third annual conference recently held in Lebanon, Bahraini activists laid out a plan of action. It includes building international connections with people who care and are willing to help. It includes supporting the International Day to End Impunity on November 23rd. It includes pushing Bahrain to join the ICC, although that may be of little value until the U.S. can be persuaded to do the same and until the United Nations can be democratized. The plan includes calls for an end to weapons sales and the initiation of sanctions against the Bahraini government (not its people).

Those would certainly be good steps. The first question in my mind remains: do the people in the nation that screams most loudly about “freedom” and does the most to support its repression wherever deemed useful, care?

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