

## VIDEO: Bahraini ‘Reformers’ in Washington, Courtesy of American Spinmeisters

By [Justin Elliott](#)

Global Research, March 01, 2012

[ProPublica](#) 28 February 2012

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [Police State](#)  
& [Civil Rights](#)

In-depth Report: [ARAB PROTEST](#)  
[MOVEMENT](#)

Earlier this month, a group of three young Bahrainis arrived in Washington to talk about reform in the small Persian Gulf nation, which has been rocked by Arab Spring protests for the last year. The delegation, including an NGO worker and a tech entrepreneur, both Western-educated, represented “the leading voice for change and reform” in Bahrain, as an email message from one of the group’s representatives put it.

But these weren’t leaders of the protest movement that has challenged the country’s ruling Sunni monarchy. They were members of a “youth delegation” put together by a top American public relations firm, Qorvis, which has been working with Bahrain to shore up the country’s image in the United States.

The youth delegation’s modestly pro-reform message was mixed with sharp criticism of the opposition in Bahrain and complaints about negative media coverage in the U.S.

Last year, in the early weeks of Bahrain’s violent crackdown on the largely Shia opposition protests, the minister of foreign affairs inked a [contract](#) with Qorvis to provide public-relations services for \$40,000 per month, plus expenses. One of the largest PR and lobbying firms in Washington, Qorvis employs a number of former top Capitol Hill staffers and also works for Bahrain’s close ally, Saudi Arabia. The firm’s work for Bahrain came under scrutiny last year when it [defended](#) the government’s [raid](#) last year on a Doctors Without Borders office in Bahrain. Also in 2011, a Qorvis official [wrote](#) pro-regime columns in The Huffington Post without revealing his affiliation with Qorvis.

Bahrain is an important American ally in the gulf, and its capital Manama is home to the U.S. Navy’s 5th Fleet. An independent commission [found](#) late last year that the government had systematically tortured detainees and used excessive force to put down the protests. While the unrest has fallen from the headlines, Bahrain [continues to](#) suppress protests, sometimes violently. And while Bahrain has promised reforms, Human Rights Watch today released a [report](#) finding “egregious violations of fair trial rights” in cases brought against opposition activists.

The Obama administration has largely stood by Bahrain, offering muted criticism while [continuing to](#) sell arms to the government, though one weapons package remains on hold.

To counter negative press, Bahrain has made a major public-relations push in the U.S., employing Qorvis and [several other firms](#). The youth delegation dispatched to Washington,

on the anniversary of the start of the protests, is the latest part of that effort.

In meetings and public appearances, the three-member Qorvis delegation has criticized opposition protesters as violent agitators.

“The message of this delegation was, things over here [in the U.S.] are portrayed so unfairly,” said Cole Bockenfeld, an official with the [Project on Middle East Democracy](#) who met with the group in mid-February and has been critical of Bahrain’s government. The delegation members said they “represent the silent majority that is very moderate but wants to see limited and stable reform.”

The Qorvis-organized group also argued that youth coalitions involved with the opposition “are a fringe group of rioters and vandals,” Bockenfeld said.

The Bahrainis in the delegation were all educated in either the United States or Canada, according to their [bios](#). One member founded a tech company that develops web and mobile applications; another works for the Bahrain branch of an NGO called Young Arab Leaders; and the third is a media specialist for the government’s Information Affairs Authority.

Qorvis did not respond to our requests for comment.

The firm’s pitch, written by staffer Adam Croglia, framed the delegation as representing the pro-reform community in Bahrain. Here’s an email from Qorvis sent to one policy analyst in Washington:

[Youth Delegation Email \(p. 1\)](#)

**From:** Adam Croglia [mailto:[acrogli@qorvis.com](mailto:acrogli@qorvis.com)]

**Subject:** Bahrain Youth Delegation

Nearly one year has passed since the outbreak of unrest in the Kingdom of Bahrain. In this time, young people have emerged as the leading voice for change and reform in the country. A multi-cultural group of these young Bahrainis will be traveling to the United States from February 13-17 and are eager to share their stories with prominent decision makers in Washington.

These future leaders of Bahrain are looking forward to sharing their experiences with Washington. The young adults are diverse in background, with many being U.S.-educated and currently working in Bahrain. For example, Ehsan Ali Al-Kooheji received an MBA from the New York Institute of Technology and founded a Bahraini-based web and mobile application development company.

The Bahraini youth delegation, including Ehsan, hopes you will be able to meet and listen to them later this month.

**Adam S.D. Croglia**  
Qorvis Communications LLC | [www.qorvis.com](http://www.qorvis.com)

But the delegation instead seemed to focus on criticizing the opposition and decrying American media coverage.

Delegation members, for example, attended a [panel](#) discussion on Bahrain on Feb. 15 at Freedom House in Washington. In the Q&A after the initial discussion, delegation member Ebtisam Khalifa Bahar, who works for the Information Affairs Authority, said:

“I tell you this: The protesters are not peaceful. I know this because I live next to a village where I see it, smell it and hear it every single day. Molotov cocktail petrol bombs being thrown in front of my home, at my car. ... I do have the same grievances that they have. I do want better jobs. I do want better reform in the government.”

Bahar then challenged an official on the panel from the Bahrain Center for Human Rights.

“I think you are betraying the Bahraini voice because you are omitting my voice. ... I want my country back the way it was, before all this hoopla started.”

Here’s video of the exchange, courtesy of Freedom House:

The original source of this article is [ProPublica](#)

Copyright © [Justin Elliott](#), [ProPublica](#), 2012

---

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Justin Elliott](#)

**Disclaimer:** The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long as the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)  
[www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)