

## Washington's "Pro-Democracy" Double Standards: Syria versus Bahrain

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*The US and its allies have wasted no time in declaring the ceasefire in Syria a failure and preparing stepped up intervention aimed at regime change in the strategically pivotal Middle Eastern country.*

After 13 months of armed violence, the failure of the plan brokered by former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan to fully resolve the conflict within 48 hours proved more than enough time for the so-called "Friends of Syria" to opt for the alternative: the promotion of a full-scale sectarian conflict that could spread throughout the region.

The US ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, spelled out Washington's position on Tuesday, announcing that "we are by no means limiting our efforts to the good diplomatic work that we are supporting here at the UN." On the contrary, she continued, the US will continue providing the so-called "rebels" in Syria with "non-lethal support," including such items as night vision goggles, sophisticated communications equipment, and US intelligence, all of which are meant to assist armed attacks on the regime's security forces.

Qatar's ruling emir, one of Washington's closest allies in the region and a key partner in the US-NATO war for regime change in Libya, told a press conference in Rome that he considered the UN ceasefire deal "immoral" and gave it "no more than a 3 percent" chance of succeeding. Qatar and Saudi Arabia announced their support for arming the opposition in a bid to topple the Assad regime.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called the ceasefire a lost cause. "Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is trying to buy time," said Erdogan. "It is the reason why Turkey does not believe in a ceasefire in the country."

The Turkish government is hosting armed groups inside its territory that carry out terrorist attacks on Syrian security forces on a regular basis, provoking cross-border skirmishes. Such clashes could provide the pretext for Turkey invoking NATO's mutual defense pact to clear the way for more direct imperialist intervention. Ankara has also initiated discussion with Washington on the seizure of Syrian territory to create a "buffer zone," where more such attacks could be prepared.

In Paris, French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe announced plans to hold a meeting of the "core members" of the Friends of Syria, i.e., Washington, London, Turkey and the monarchical dictatorships of the Gulf Cooperation Council, to tighten economic sanctions that have already driven unemployment past the 35 percent mark and cut real wages of Syrian workers in half. The aim is, as Richard Nixon said of Chile some 40 years ago, to "make the economy scream," creating the best conditions for a societal collapse and all out civil war.

There is nothing that Assad could do to alter the positions of these proponents of regime change outside of committing political and physical suicide.

The campaign to topple the Assad government is publicly justified in the name of the “Arab Spring,” “democracy” and “human rights.” Such claims are belied, however, by the utter indifference of the “Friends” to—and indeed support for—the crushing of a mass movement for democracy and human rights on the other end of the Arabian Peninsula.

Amnesty International this week released a scathing report on Bahrain, declaring, “Despite the authorities’ claims to the contrary, state violence against those who oppose the Al Khalifa family rule continues, and in practice not much has changed in the country since the brutal crackdown on anti-government protesters in February and March 2011.” That crackdown saw Saudi troops and tanks stream across the causeway linking Bahrain to the Arabian Peninsula to carry out the military suppression of unarmed protesters.

The report chronicles an aggressive public relations campaign by the US and the Saudi-backed Sunni monarchy, which rules an apartheid-style state that systematically discriminates against the 70 percent Shia majority. In addition to contracting high-priced American PR firms, King Hamad and his regime created the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), which “concluded that the authorities had committed gross human rights violations with impunity, including excessive use of force against protesters, widespread torture and other ill-treatment of protesters, unfair trials and unlawful killings.”

The King and his retinue duly thanked the commission and, according to the Amnesty report, continued all the crimes that it had documented: unlawful killings, torture, military tribunals and the imprisonment of hundreds of people whose sole crime was to peacefully demonstrate for their rights.

Among these prisoners is Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, a prominent human rights defender who was arrested in April 2011, brutally tortured, and charged, together with 20 other opposition figures, with setting up “terror groups” to bring down the monarchy. He has now been on hunger strike for more than two months and is reportedly near death.

The sham “independent commission,” whose findings have been utterly ignored, proved more than adequate for Washington and the other NATO powers to whitewash the al-Khalifa regime. The decision to go ahead with Formula 1’s Bahrain Grand Prix next weekend amounts to an international seal of approval.

One can only imagine the uproar if Assad in Syria were to try a similar maneuver.

The US is once again supplying ample arms to the royal dictatorship, so that it can continue killing and repressing the masses, a far greater percentage of whom have come into the streets than in Syria. The White House spokesman, meanwhile, cynically urges “all parties to reject violence.”

The reasons for this glaring double standard are obvious. Bahrain hosts the US Fifth Fleet, providing it with a base of operations on the western banks of the Persian Gulf facing Iran and within easy striking distance of the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

Syria, on the other hand, has been targeted as a stepping-stone toward a far more devastating war against Iran, which is seen by US imperialism as an impediment to its drive to assert hegemony over the oil-rich regions of the Persian Gulf and Central Asia. This

strategy inevitably draws in China and Russia, which see Washington's wars and destabilization campaigns as directed at destroying their interests and influence in the Middle East.

All the moral posturing over Syria and attempts to justify intervention in the name of "human rights" and "democracy" are, as Bahrain demonstrates, sheer hypocrisy, designed solely to manipulate public opinion in support of this predatory and dangerous war drive.

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