

BAHRAIN

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Bahrainis are adamant on achieving Alkhalifa downfall

The political scene in Bahrain may appear a reflection of past episodes of protests and anti-regime's sentiments. But this is not a true reflection or understanding of the ongoing saga. This time it is clear that the popular movement is more serious and determined to achieve total victory, and not to be lured by hollow promises and empty gestures by Alkhalifa hereditary dictatorship. Time has now expired for such approaches. The regime has repeatedly forfeited any trust the people may have in the past, and new realities entail different popular approach to the ongoing political saga. The five years that have elapsed since the beginning of the present chapter of confrontation between the native Bahraini population and the Alkhalifa occupiers, have confirmed to the people the futility of pinning hopes on the dictatorial hereditary Alkhalifa rule. Mutual trust has totally vanished and the regime is becoming more belligerent towards the natives. Its policies of marginalising them while importing new foreign "Bahrainis" to replace them in their homeland have proven ill-placed and poorly executed. Taken together with other policies like revoking citizenship, mass arrests, banning Friday prayers, detention of tens of religious scholars and denial of high office, the Alkhalifa have been rightly accused of persecution of the native Shia population. This is a crime against humanity for which the dictator and his clique must be duly punished.

In the previous decades there had been many uprisings against Alkhalifa oppression. Thousands were arrested, tortured and many were banished. The aim has always been to establish a modern state governed by democracy and constitutional law. Successive generations chose to enhance the tribal rule without necessarily calling for its removal. There has always been the hope that the situation under Alkhalifa tribal rule would provide a reasonable alternative to absolute monarchy and repressive administration. Those hopes were never materialised. In almost all struggles the tribal rule adopted ruthless measures to repress the people, aided by foreign powers, most notably, the United Kingdom. It is puzzling to see this British policy continuing despite the persistent outcry by the world's community

against their dictatorship and human rights abuses. This explains the change in temper and aims of the people who decided to stage their Revolution against all the odds at the time. They were successful in mobilising public opinion against the regime's tyranny until it reached a state where the regime's presence is totally and unconditionally rejected. The only thing that has remained for Alkhalifa dictators is the Saudi support, while the UK stands under serious consideration. This follows the sudden emergence of anti-Saudi sentiments and with them anti-Alkhalifa public opinion.

Over the past few weeks the world opinion has shifted against the Saudi war on Yemen. This has enhanced the people's anti-regime salutations and entrenched their determination to uproot corruption and dictatorship. The Turkish failed coup appears to be a turning point in the regional alliances and the Saudis are gradually losing their centrality in the Muslim World. There is deeper realisation that the Muslims are forced to pay for the Saudi aggressive policies that have only led to more extremism and terrorism. The Turks are now poised to play a more moderate role and forge stronger links with Russia and Iran. They are ready to take a more positive stand towards Syria and Iraq. Last year the Saudis tried and failed to woo the Turks into participation in their ill-fated war on Yemen. Today they stand to lose that war with more casualties and daily humiliation. The AlQa'ida has spread its presence in Yemen and the Saudis are seen as their main supporters and facilitators. The Muslim world is duty bound to end the strife in Yemen, stop the Saudi expansionism and spare the Muslims and the rest of the world the dangerous consequences of terrorism and fanaticism groomed and financed by the Saudis. Bahrainis are watching these developments closely as they resist the Alkhalifa dictators who are relying on two main countries; Saudi Arabia and UK. As the Saudi military losses mount, their oil revenues shrink and their reserves dwindle, it is becoming a realistic prospect that the Saudis will suffer humiliating downfall. The UK government, on the other side, is also being pushed into a corner in the wake of the Brexit saga and their ill-fated

support of the Saudi aggression on Yemen. The admission by the FCO on the last day of Parliament in July that, contrary to several assertions by its officials earlier, they did not carry out an assessment of whether the Saudis had committed war crimes in Yemen, has focussed the attention on UK's foreign policy under Philip Hammond. There is widespread fear that the UK may be dragged to the controversy surrounding the war crimes in Yemen especially that London had supported the Saudi aggression from the first day. Furthermore, repeated statements by UK officials of their commitment to Saudis in terms of arms supplies, intelligence and expertise, threaten to expose the role of David Cameron's cabinet in the Yemeni quagmire. The Alkhalifa's main supporters are thus crumbling as the consequences of illegal war catch up with the aggressors. Furthermore, the atrocious policies of the Alkhalifa are beginning to haunt them and their supporters. There is widespread condemnation, even from the Americans, of their persecution of the native majority. The statement by five UN experts condemning this persecution and calling for an immediate end to Alkhalifa's oppression has shaken their backers and exposed the level of hypocrisy among them.

Meanwhile the Bahraini people are made to pay hefty price for their steadfastness. They are the only people who have remained faithful to their Revolution; preserving their peaceful nature and insisting on achieving their inalienable rights of self-determination and drawing their own future. They continue to endure extreme hardship. For more than two months the town of Duraz has been under siege as the people kept round the clock vigil around the home of Ayatullah Sheikh Isa Qassim. Scores of religious scholars have been persecuted by arrest and unfair trials. The world community has, so far, done little to alleviate the suffering of the native Bahrainis. But their struggle continues. For them there is only one acceptable outcome of their suffrage; to preserve their identity and that of their homeland and to determine their own destiny. They are ready to continue their struggle and pay any price for their victory. This implies one thing; the Alkhalifa tribal rule must go.

UK urged to oppose Saudi HRC post, Alkhalifa intensify genocide

Calls have been made for the UK Government to vote against Saudi Arabia retaining the powerful chairmanship of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) after a year which saw the country's government savagely bomb Yemen, commit vast numbers of beheadings, a mass execution and detain activists. Their call, on World Humanitarian Day, comes ahead of a critical UN vote on whether Saudi Arabia remains in the post, which it has controversially held since this time last year. But ministers still refuse to say whether they will back the kingdom or not. It follows recently emerged details of the huge quantities of military aircraft, bombs and arms the UK is selling Saudi Arabia, some of which have been used in a Yemeni campaign described as a "human catastrophe". The vote on 13 September is a golden opportunity for Ms May's new government to demonstrate it truly values human rights. Liberal Democrat Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Tom Brake accused the Government of making "endless excuses for the Saudi regime". Amnesty International meanwhile demanded the UK hold Saudi to account for "its appalling human rights record and the ongoing war crimes in Yemen". Yesterday Oxfam warned that British weapons sales to Saudi Arabia are a serious violation of international law, because the Gulf nation's bombing campaign in Yemen is regularly hitting civilian targets including schools and hospitals. The UK government has switched from being an "enthusiastic backer" of the Arms Trade Treaty to "one of the most significant violators", a senior executive at the charity told a conference on the global agreement in Geneva.

Meanwhile the rising world criticism of the Saudi aggression on Yemen has apparently convinced Washington to make slight shift in its pro-Saudi strategy. The

U.S. military has withdrawn from Saudi Arabia its personnel who were coordinating with the Saudi-led air campaign in Yemen, and sharply reduced the number of staff elsewhere who were assisting in that planning, U.S. officials told Reuters. Fewer than five U.S. service people are now assigned full-time to the "Joint Combined Planning Cell," which was established last year to coordinate U.S. support, including air-to-air refuelling of coalition jets and limited intelligence-sharing, Lieutenant Ian McConaughy, a U.S. Navy spokesman in Bahrain, told Reuters.

In Bahrain, the situation has worsened. In the week between 15th-22nd August at least 16 people were arrested including three women according to the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights. Several people were tried and given lengthy jail sentences. Sheikh Ali Humaidan, a cleric who attended the vigil outside Ayatullah sheikh Isa Qassim's home has been sentenced to one year jail for "illegal gathering". The British-backed Alkhalifa dictators consider any gathering without their permission "illegal" punishable with jail. Yesterday Ali Jaffar Feter from AlQadam Town was snatched from his work place. Armed mercenaries of Alkhalifa torture apparatus snatched Ra'id Mohammad Aman, from Sadad Town, also from his work place. Prominent woman activist, Ghada Jamshir was arrested last week at the airport. Last year she was given 20 months sentence for criticising one of the most vicious Alkhalifa members and director of dictator's palace.

The native Bahraini prisoners at the Dry Dock prison are continuing their hunger strike since they started on 18th August. They are protesting ill-treatment by prison officers, the lack of open air sports period and the continuous threats to be transferred to solitary confinement. Their families are

extremely worried about the welfare and safety of their children who are enduring extreme hardship and abuse. Yesterday lawyer Mohammad AlTajir was stopped at the airport and prevented from leaving the country. On 21st August, Enas Aoun, member of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights was prevented from leaving the country. Taiba Ismail, a native Bahraini housewife was remanded in custody for two more weeks accused of humiliating the dictator. She has been in detention for 52 days for criticising the dictator on twitter.

In one of the most embarrassing and revealing money-for-support policy of Alkhalifa dictators newly released US Department of State documents reveal that Alkhalifa crown prince was given an audience with then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton after he donated \$32 million to her foundation. The documents, released 22nd August by Judicial Watch, included emails between Clinton Foundation executive Doug Band and former Clinton State Department aide Huma Abedin, which appear to show that Abedin acted as a middleman between Clinton and her foundation's donors. An email, dated June 25, 2009, from Abedin to Band offers Salman a 10 A.M. meeting with Clinton. Abedin said she "reached out [through] official channels" to secure the meeting. Western leaders allow tyrants to plunder people's money with no question.

Yesterday Human Rights Watch said Bahraini authorities are systematically targeting Shiite clerics and violating their rights to freedom of assembly following a decision to strip the country's top Shiite cleric of his nationality. It said at least 56 other clerics have been questioned or charged by authorities since June.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
24th August 2016

Congress: Stop arms to Saudis, UN to AlKhalifa; Stop persecuting natives

A proposed petition to block arms transfer to Saudi Arabia has been presented to the Congress for members to sign. A bipartisan group of Senators is moving to block the \$1.15 billion sale of US tanks to Saudi Arabia, citing concerns over human rights and the Saudi-led war in Yemen. Riyadh has requested new tanks to modernize its arsenal and replace battlefield losses. It aims to force a public debate on US participation in the Saudi war in Yemen by advocating for blocking the planned transfer of US tanks and armoured vehicles to Saudi Arabia. The petition follows a notification to the Congress by US Defence Security Cooperation Agency on 8th August of a proposed sale of 153 tanks and 20 armoured vehicles to Saudi Arabia which it describes as "a strategic regional partner which has been and continues to be a leading contributor of political stability and economic progress in the Middle East." This proposed arms transfer would signal to actors in Yemen that the U.S. seeks to

escalate the war rather than promoting a negotiated resolution.

In one of the most significant and far-reaching international stands, five UN experts urged Bahraini authorities to halt what they said were "arbitrary arrests" based on religion and release those detained for free speech and assembly. "The intensified wave of arrests, detentions, summons, interrogations and criminal charges brought against numerous Shi'ite religious clerics and singers, human rights defenders and peaceful dissidents is having a chilling effect on fundamental human rights," the U.N. experts said. They cited measures including the dissolution of the main opposition al-Wefaq group, the shutting of faith-based organizations and a preaching ban for some Shi'ite holy men. "A wide range of charges are brought against the Shi'ites including 'illegal gathering', 'inciting hatred against the regime', 'money laundering' and 'acts of terrorism' in relation to their peaceful gatherings and

religious congregations and peaceful expression of their beliefs, views and dissenting opinions," the experts said. They called these "groundless accusations used to hide a deliberate targeting of Shias in the country".

The Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) documented at least 26 arbitrary arrests in the week 9-15th August including three children. It also said that 19 native Bahrainis were given lengthy jail sentences in four separate cases. There were at least 69 demonstrations in 31 towns and villages, some of which were attacked by Alkhalifa mercenary forces. New advice from Western backers has forced what appears to be a change of tactics. Senior figures are now being rounded up especially religious scholars, doctors and public figures. Dr Taha AlDurazi, 62, the most senior surgeon in the country has been remanded in custody for 15 days. He had been prevented from travelling in June.

Continued on Page 3

FCO's policy of misleading MPs over Saudi, Alkhalifa crimes exposed

Anger is mounting at the US decision to supply the Saudis with advanced aircrafts despite their bleak record of massive war crimes in Yemen. The Saudi Airforce is to receive 152 F-15SAs, of which 84 will be new build and 68 will be remanufactured F-15S platforms. Procured under a \$29.4 billion Foreign Military Sale (the largest in US history), the F-15SA is the most advanced variant of the Eagle ordered to date. The UK's FCO is under intense pressure to explain why its officials and ministers had misled MPs over Saudi war crimes in Yemen. Last month the FCO retracted statements by Philip Hammond denying Saudi war crimes.

Meanwhile a British Foreign Office minister has been accused of "covering up" a case of torture in Bahrain, a key Middle Eastern ally whose prisons system has received millions of pounds worth of support from Britain. The statements by Tobias Ellwood, MP, concern the case of Mohammed Ramadan, a 32-year-old airport policeman who was falsely accused of involvement in killing a police officer in February 2014 and subsequently sentenced to death. He was forced under torture to sign false confessions to the crime. On 19 April this year, Ellwood told the House of Commons that British embassy officials had been in direct contact with Bahrain's prison ombudsman and that the watchdog, which is part of a programme that receives £2 million worth of support from the Foreign Office, had told his department there had been "no allegations of mistreatment or torture" in relation with the case. It has now been confirmed that not only was this incorrect, it was a line the Foreign Office stuck to for months despite being repeatedly provided with evidence to the contrary by human rights organisations. Last month Ellwood's line shifted to: "We appear not to have received any evidence in relation to this case." Documents have been revealed that suggest this was also incorrect and that several pieces of evidence showing there had been complaints of torture had in fact been handed to the Foreign Office. Days later, Ellwood wrote to campaigners, admitting: "We fully acknowledge that complaints [of torture] were made and my response was given in good faith." The parliamentary record has yet to correct these statements.

In the week 1st to 7th August at least 29 people were arrested by British-backed Alkhalifa torture apparatus. They include one woman and two children. There were at least 47 marches in 26 towns and villages. Several of them were attacked by regime's mercenary forces. The persecution of the native majority has continued. At least 41 active religious scholars were summoned for interrogation in relation to their support of Ayatullah Sheikh Isa

Qassim. Among the scholars summoned and remanded in custody are: Mulla Habib Meftah, Sheikh Isa AlMo'min, Sheikh Mohammad Jawad AlShehabi, Sheikh Ali AlHamali and Sheikh Fadel AlZaki. Another prominent religious figure is being tried in court for taking part in the rally around Ayatullah Sheikh Isa's house. Sayed Majeed AlMesh'al, the former president of the Religious Scholars Council, appeared at Alkhalifa court on Monday charged with taking part in a rally without Alkhalifa permission and promoting hatred of Alkhalifa dictatorship. Among the youth who have been detained are Hussain Hassan Mohammad who was abducted from the Bahrain-Saudi causeway, Abdul Reda Abdullah, 15, Sayed Ali Sayed Ahmad and Mustafa AlDurazi, a popular orator.

Concern is rising for the health of Nabeel Rajab, the most prominent human rights activist in the Arab World. He is reported to be suffering from acute stomach ailment that has led to continuous bleeding. His family has been supplying him with medical needs to stop it but with no success. Alkhalifa dictator is exacting revenge on Mr Rajab for refusing to remain silent as regime's atrocities against the native majority continued. Regime's officials have repeatedly cancelled appointments for Nabeel to see medical specialists. They want him to suffer or even die in his solitary confinement.

Last week native Bahraini prisoner, Ali Shaiboob was taken from his cell by masked men and nothing has been heard of him since. His cries were heard by other prisoners as he was being tortured. He had a family visit few days earlier which was cut to nine minutes only after arguing with one of the torturers about his treatment. The regime has turned the country into absolute police state. Any argument with the regime's mercenaries, whether inside jail, at check points or at the persecution office, would automatically be considered a crime. The native Bahraini would be charged with "assault" and would be jailed for years. At least seven other prisoners were transferred to solitary confinement and subjected to horrific daily torture.

A new technical investigation published on 4th August by Bahrain Watch found evidence that Internet Service Providers (ISPs) Batelco and Zain have been deliberately degrading and disabling Internet services every night in the village of Duraz between 7:00PM and 1:00AM for more than a month. Duraz has been the centre of protests since June 20, when Alkhalifa regime revoked the citizenship of leading Shia Muslim Cleric Isa Qassim, a resident of the village. Residents of Duraz have been complaining of nightly Internet disruptions since June 23.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
10th August 2016

Calls to stop arming Saudis, *Continued from Page 2*

Religious orators Mulla Hani AlBeladi and Ali Aman were given same custody. The interfaith activist, Sheikh Maytham AlSalman has been arrested and remanded in custody for 15 days. Yesterday a native Bahraini couple were seized at the airport and taken to the torture chambers. Mohammad Ali Mas'ood and his wife were abducted on their way for holiday.

British police have come under fire for their role in training Bahrain's police force, which has been accused of ruthlessly suppressing public protests and dissent. A confidential 27-page "agreement for the provision of services", obtained by the Observer, was signed on 14 June 2015 by the UK's College of Policing and Bahrain's Ministry of Interior. It spells out the explicitly commercial nature of the relationship between the two parties, but omits any mention of human rights issues. Since it was created in 2012, the college has earned more than £8.5m from its international work, but has faced questions about its remit. Parliament's home affairs select committee recently criticised the college's overseas training programme, claiming that "opaque" agreements with foreign governments, which have been criticised for human rights abuses, "threaten the integrity of the

very brand of British policing that the college is trying to promote".

In a test to the recently-appointed UK's foreign secretary, human rights organisations have asked him to take more principled stand with regards to the situation in Bahrain. According to The Guardian on Monday 15th July, The Bahraini Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD), Index on Censorship and Reporters Without Borders (RSF) have written a letter to Boris Johnson urging him to investigate the role of the current Alkhalifa ambassador in London in persecuting journalists in 2011. As a member of the ruling family, he was in charge of the media at a time when non-conformists would be persecuted, ill-treated and severely punished.

The case of the prominent journalist, Nazeera Saeed served notice to the world that Alkhalifa would stop at nothing in suppressing the news of their crimes. The letter calls on Mr Johnson to investigate the role of the ambassador in that period when he was the chairman of the Media Commission which was in charge of media affairs including official Bahrain TV. The letter highlighted the temporary closure of AlWasat newspaper, and the persecution and torture of Nazeera Saeed, the France 24 correspondent in Bahrain.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
17th August 2016

UN rights experts urge Bahrain to end the persecution of Shias

GENEVA (16 August 2016) – The systematic harassment of the Shia population by the authorities in Bahrain, including stripping many of them of citizenship, is deeply concerning, a group of United Nations human rights independent experts* said today. “The intensified wave of arrests, detentions, summons, interrogations and criminal charges brought against numerous Shia religious clerics and singers, human rights defenders and peaceful dissidents is having a chilling effect on fundamental human rights,” the human rights experts said.

“Shias are clearly being targeted on the basis of their religion,” the experts highlighted. “Recently, we witnessed the dissolution of Al-Wafaq National Islamic Society, the shutting of faith-based organizations, restrictions on the practice of religious rites, on Friday prayers and peaceful assemblies, restrictions on movement, restricted access to the Internet and a ban on Shia religious leaders from preaching.”

A wide range of charges are brought against the Shias including ‘illegal gathering’, ‘inciting hatred against the regime’, ‘money laundering’ and ‘acts of terrorism’ in relation to their peaceful gatherings and religious congregations and peaceful expression of their beliefs, views and dissenting opinions, which the experts described as “groundless accusations used to hide a deliberate targeting of Shias in the country.”

“These charges should not be used as a pretext to restrict the freedom of expression, freedom of association and peaceful assembly and freedom of religion or belief,” the UN experts stressed.

“The authorities are also using the Bahrain Citizenship Act or Protection of Society against Acts of Terror law to revoke citizenship. People are being left stateless and are facing deportation from Bahrain,” they said.

The human rights experts expressed concern at allegations that the Government, via an administrative order, had revoked the citizenship of Ayatollah Sheikh Isa Qassim on 20 June 2016, without giving him an opportunity to defend himself. He has also been charged with illegal fundraising and money laundering and his case will be heard in court on 15 September 2016.

“We are also worried to learn that Sheikh Maytham Al-Salman, a human rights defender who has faced a de-facto travel ban since January this year, was brought to the public prosecution yesterday on charges of “illegal gathering” after he was subjected to long hours of interroga-

tion on 14 August 2016 and overnight detention,” the experts noted. “We are calling on the Government of Bahrain to stop such arbitrary arrests or summons and release all those who have been detained for exercising their rights,” they said. “The authorities should also lift the restrictions on movement including travel bans imposed on different Shia religious leaders and human rights defenders.” “The Government should not resort to repressive measures and we urge it to enter into dialogue with all relevant parties in order to prevent unnecessary conflict and violence,” the human rights experts concluded.

(*) The experts: Mr. Sètondji Adjovi, Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; Mr. David Kaye, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Mr. Maina Kiai, Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful

assembly and of association; Mr. Heiner Bielefeldt, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief; and Mr. Michel Forst, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders.

The UN Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups are part of what is known as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights, is the general name of the independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms of the Human Rights Council that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures’ experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity.

30 NGOs call on Bahrain to restore Duraz internet

On 23rd August, a coalition of nearly 30 organizations from around the world called on authorities in Bahrain to restore the internet in the country. Citing complex disruptions to internet service that were recorded in the neighborhood of Duraz, the letter (PDF) demands that the telecoms authority turn the internet back on and commit to transparency related to shutdown orders.

“It’s clear that there is a coordinated effort across several ISPs to shut down mobile towers in Duraz at the same time every night, and deliberately degrade landline internet traffic,” said Bill Marczak, co-founder of Bahrain Watch.

Rights groups first recorded disruptions in June around street demonstrations that arose amidst a general economic slowdown, and directly followed the government’s decision to strip citizenship from a prominent cleric. The non-profit organization Bahrain Watch then conducted an in-depth technical study of the shutdown to understand how it was implemented, which turned out to be a more complex form than seen before.

“Whatever their form, internet shutdowns are early warning mechanisms of human rights violations,” said Deji Bryce Olukotun, Senior Global Advocacy Manager at Access

Now. “Disrupting the internet at night amounts to a digital curfew that harms the right of people to seek, receive, and impart information, and blocks crucial access to emergency services. Shutting down the internet in such a sneaky manner only furthers mistrust in the government and telecom authorities.”

The letter, which was delivered to the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Bahrain, among other agencies, makes specific recommendations to authorities, including canceling any “service restriction orders” to telecommunications companies that enabled the shutdown; providing transparency around such orders; and respecting the right of Bahrainis to freedom of expression.

The coalition signers of the letter are members of the #KeepitOn campaign to fight internet shutdowns around the world, and include groups from as far afield as Pakistan, Uganda, the Cook Islands, Lebanon, the United States, and Malaysia. Earlier this year U.N. Special Rapporteur Maina Kiai pushed back strongly against the use of shutdowns during protests, and in July the United Nations Human Rights Council passed

a resolution that specifically condemns internet shutdowns. The Global Network Initiative also joined the Industry Dialogue — which together include Facebook, Google, Microsoft, AT&T and Vodafone — to speak out against shutdowns. This statement was swiftly followed by a policy position from the GSMA, one of the world’s largest technology associations, that laid out strict standards for orders issued to telcos to restrict service.

