

BAHRAIN

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Western indifference is dangerous, time to uphold democracy

The way the Western countries have been dealing with Bahrain falls short of their declared principles of promoting democracy and defending human rights. For the past 100 years the people of Bahrain have struggled to achieve those two objectives and have paid dearly on the way. The accumulative experience has convinced them that the present rulers can, in no way, reform themselves and their political system to achieve these objectives. Tyrants cannot become democrats; torturers who enjoy unprecedented immunity cannot become protector of human rights. The West knows these facts from experience. This is one of the reasons why the world put its act together in the aftermath of the Second World War to lay down the foundation of the present political world order. The Geneva conventions, the various covenants regulating the political, social, cultural and economic rights were formulated as well as the treaties, laws and conventions that protect human rights. As the world prepares to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (on 10th December) many questions remain to be answered as whether this Declaration has been effective in securing the rights of the people. The outgoing High Commissioner of Human Rights is leaving his office with deep feelings of helplessness, having witnessed how the world powers have cooperated to ignore the plight of those whose rights re crushed at the torture chambers run by Western allies in the Middle East. Of particular concern to him is the plight of the Bahraini people whose rights have been crushed by the Alkhalifa dictators and whose cries for help from the "Free World" were ignored for decades. The crisis of Bahrain is not confined to human rights abuses. These are a product of a political system that is simply incapable of respecting people's rights. In the dictionary of these rulers, who belong to ancient Bedouin clans, the rights of the people are determined by the ruler himself. He is the judge and executioner at the same time. The dictator has absolute right to do whatever is necessary to preserve his position at the helm of power. For the people of this troubled island, this is not acceptable. For decades their struggle has continued. Generation after generation were subjected to inhumane treatment at the hands of the Alkhalifa rulers. When the British were ruling the country under special treaties of

protection, the tribal role was secondary. The British colonialists did their part to subdue the Bahraini opposition. They installed successive security officials to deal with the unrests that have continued since 1922. The most notorious of these was Ian Henderson, a British colonial officer who had led the campaign against the Mao Mao insurgents in Kenya in the fifties. He was instrumental in the capture and execution of Dedan Kimathy (known by British authorities as General China). After the success of the Mao Mao uprising in 1964 the new prime minister, Oginga Odinga ordered Ian Henderson to leave the country within 24 hours. Subsequently he was recruited to work for the Alkhalifa. Since his arrival in April 1966 Henderson acted with impunity to quell the revolutionary fervour of the people. By the late sixties his heavy-handed methods led to the brutal suppression of the Bahrain National Liberation Front. Its members were rounded by Henderson's men and subjected to most horrific torture.

The national struggle continued unabated. Then came the brief democratic experience in the first half of the seventies. It was soon halted when the regime failed to constitutionalise its repression. In 1974 the bill for the notorious state security law as rejected by an alliance between the liberals, leftists and Islamists. That signalled the end of the democratic experience that lasted less than three years. That single act on 25th August 1975 was the most outrageous crime by the Alkhalifa regime that pushed the country to the abyss of political crisis from which it has never recovered. Under foreign plans the current dictator was directed to appear to give some concessions to the Bahraini people. The plan was to circumvent the popular uprising that had started in 1994 by introducing "pseudo-democracy" which was immediately recognised by the opposition as a scam. The current crisis is just an extension of decades-long political debacle the country has been experiencing under the rule of the most reactionary, brutal and corrupt tribal regime in the region. But what has emboldened it to continue its war on democracy and human rights is the regional and Western support.

The era of the post-WW2 which gave some hope to the world seventy years

ago has started to declined after the atrocious terrorist acts of 2011. The world is paying the price for a Western experiment that has gone disastrously wrong. The support of armed insurrection against the Soviet brutal occupation of Afghanistan led to the present status quo. The rights of the people, everywhere, have been compromised by short-sighted policies by the Anglo-American alliance. The rise of Trump has only exacerbated the crisis. Europe is now facing the prospect of internal tensions with UK's Brexit, the American enmity of the European Union, the rise of the far right in almost all of Europe and the stagnation of the relations with Russia. Among the fall outs of this is the rise of the most tyrannical regimes in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates are locked in a an unwinnable war on Yemen. Apart from the billions of petro dollars extracted by America from them the world has been put on notice that the worse of scenarios has not happened yet. This is not a sustainable situation. The world is under the continuous spectre of big wars as Trump, supported by the unholy alliance of Israel, Saudi Arabia and UAE, adopt extremely hawkish and policies and evil desires not only to control the region but to control the US foreign policy.

What does this mean? The struggle of the Arab people to achieve democratic transformation and end the hegemonic policies of the counter-revolution alliance may subside but will not disappear. The people of Bahrain, and those of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, UAE and others cannot be subjugated for much longer by regimes that have harboured disdain and hate of the post-WW2 democratic and human rights developments, conventions and culture. Repression in not the answer. The present world order of indifference to the rise of repression, culture of hate, extremism at all levels and communal tensions is not sustainable. Despite its debacle with its Brexit ordeal, the UK and its European partners must adopt new foreign policies that embrace the ideals of those who had helped frame the culture of democracy and human rights. UK needs to address the Bahraini crisis and stop supporting those who abuse power and adopt repression to continue their tyranny and enmity to modernity, rule of law, people's participation, inclusion and human rights.

UAE snubbed by ICJ as Alkhalifa deny prisoners health care

On Monday 23rd July the International Court of Justice called on the UAE to allow families containing Qataris to be reunited, for Qatari students in the country to be allowed to complete their courses, and for Qataris to have access to the UAE's judicial system restored. "Many Qataris residing in the United Arab Emirates appear to have been forced to leave their places of residence without the possibility of return," said Judge Abdulqawi Ahmed Yusuf, referring to the measures imposed by the UAE on Qataris living in the country in June 2017. He said that those affected included mixed Qatari-Emirati families who had been separated by the blockade, and Qatari students who had not been able to complete their education in the UAE. The UAE ordered all Qataris to leave and imposed other restrictions as part of a blockade of Qatar imposed on 5 June last year in conjunction with Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Bahrain.

In another serious regional development reports have surfaced recently of plans to build a canal between Saudi Arabia and Qatar which would turn Qatar into an island. The proposed 'Salwa Canal' would be funded by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and would be 60 km long, 200m wide, and 15-20m deep. The canal would cost about 750 million dollars and stretch from Salwa to Khor Al Adeed but would be within Saudi territory. The plan envisages the construction of a Saudi military outpost and a dumping area for nuclear waste from a proposed Saudi reactor. Saudi Arabia's animosity towards Qatar is part of an aggressive set of foreign and domestic policies, spearheaded by Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), known for his role in

Yemen's humanitarian disaster. Another of his controversial initiatives is the campaign against Qatar, which has removed Qatar from the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Bahrain's most senior religious and political leader is recovering in London after surgery. Yesterday Sheikh Isa Qassim had an operation at a London hospital two weeks after arriving in UK for treatment. He has been targeted for revenge by the dictator for standing with the people.

Denying political prisoners proper medical care is a new form of torture being implemented by Alkhalifa torturers. Following advice from foreign experts to minimise the use of traditional torture methods, the regime's torturers have now resorted to this tactic. There are hundreds of examples where inmates are denied medical care and medicine. In several cases, the inmates either died or developed more serious illnesses. Mr Hassan Mushaima, one of the most prominent leaders of the people's Revolution has not been allowed to see a doctor or get medicines for his cancer ailment for more than a year. This 71 years old man has now been told that a condition to see a doctor is to be shackled in Guantanamo style of chains. He refuses to be humiliated in this way. It is not clear whether the British Prison Inspection Team which is helping Alkhalifa torturers has taken any steps to stop this potentially lethal form of torture. Two weeks ago another prominent figure, Dr Abdul Jalil Al Singace was denied a visit to the doctor for the same reasons. Another prominent political prisoner is Mrs Hajar Mansoor, the mother-in-law of human rights activist Sayed Ahmad Al Wadaei. Yesterday she was transferred to the hospital, several days after she had complained of serious

pain in her body. She has been denied medication for a long time despite her ailing health. The woman officer in charge of the native Bahraini women activists has committed serious crimes against humanity, harassing women prisoners of conscience. Her crimes are being documented for future indictment.

The family of under-aged political prisoner, Sayed Ali Abbas, has raised serious concerns and worry about his health. The boy has been denied medical treatment for a year. Another young inmate is also suffering from the lack of proper medical treatment. Usama Al Saghir is facing slow death at the hands of those in charge of prisons. He was hit by regime's forces during their criminal attack on Sheikh Isa Qassim's house on 23rd May 2017. A direct shotgun to his head caused him serious injuries and pain. Despite this, he was "tried" and sentenced to 46 years in jail. In addition his nationality was revoked. The dictator has denied him proper medical care or adequate medication.

On 22nd July Mohammad Al Khatam who had protested one week earlier to demand a job has been given seven days extension to his detention. He was arrested when he held a one-man protest on 15th July to protest the ban imposed on his employment for many years. He has not been able to provide the needs of his family and has defaulted on some payments. When he appeared at Alkhalifa kangaroo court and explained his situation the judge ordered the extended detention. He had hoped that his protest would lead him to the workplace. Instead it landed him at one of Alkhalifa torture chambers.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
25th July 2018

UK is not transparent on Saudis, IMF confirms Alkhalifa fiscal failure

In her response to the human rights report published by the FCO on Monday, UK's Shadow Foreign Secretary, Emily Thornberry criticised its lack of transparency when it comes to Saudi Arabia. She said that the report had "not a single mention in its Yemen section of the Saudi-led coalition, its air strikes and blockade. It talks about civilian casualties but doesn't identify the main party responsible!". That is shameful to come from the UK government. If in the 21st century, the UK still shies away from speaking out clearly against the flagrant human rights violations routinely committed by the Saudi and Alkhalifa regimes, then what has remained of the values of democracy, justice and the rule of law?

In a serious escalation of the process of political polarization in Yemen, the deposed Yemeni president, Hadi Mansour has been ordered by the Saudis to dismiss the Governor of AlMahra Province, which is adjacent to the Sultanate of Oman. Sheikh Ali Salem Al Huraizi was sacked because he had joined the protest-

ers who had taken to the streets of the province against the occupation of their country by Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates. The international outcry against the torture of political detainees by Emirati forces that culminated in a damning report by Amnesty International last week, has been met with defiance by the UAE occupiers. "The report is politically motivated to undermine its efforts as part of the Arab Coalition to support the Yemeni government," the UAE government said in an official statement.

A Bahraini native who had been without work for years has been detained after he held a one-man protest to draw attention to his case. Mohammad Khatam, in his forties, is married with four children but has no job. He was arrested several times in the nineties, tortured and abused. He was implicated in a trumpeted up case that led to the execution of another native citizen, Isa Qambar in 1996. He was also arrested in the present round of repression following the eruption of the 14th February Revolution. Since he left prison in

2001 he has been on the blacklist of the Alkhalifa regime. His employment has thus become impossible. Four days ago he recorded a video message describing his life without employment and promising to hold a one-man protest to demand work. He was arrested and taken to the regime's torture dungeons.

In the past few days regime's security forces waged relentless attacks on prisoners at the notorious Jaw Prison. The attackers were searching for books, pens, copies of the holy Quran or any other educational material, following a ban on these items. Several inmates were transferred to solitary confinement including: Mohammad Mirza (from AlMusalla town), Fadhel (the prominent volleyball player) from Karzakkan, Sadeq Al Asfoor from Duraz, Abdul Rahman (at Block 4), Yousuf Barakat from Al Daih, Ammar Hassan from Aali, Khalid Saeed (of Block 10), Ahmad Abdul Wahed Al Markhi, Ahmad Jalal Al Markhi, Mohammad Hassan AlJazeera and Ahmad Hussain from Aali, all held at Block 13. They

Yemen war helped AlQa'eda; Senior Bahraini religious figure banished

International concerns are rising due to the expansion of ISIS and Al Qa'ida in Yemen due to the actions of Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates. Under the heading: "Still fighting Al-Qaeda" on 6th July, the Washington Post said: AQAP (Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula) exploited the vacuum created by the civil war to seize territory, weapons and money. Al-Qaeda militants retook control over Jaar and Abyan's provincial capital, Zinjibar, and swept into Mukalla, Yemen's fifth-largest city and a major port. Meanwhile, over the past four years, the rival Islamic State has spawned its own modest affiliate in Yemen with at most a few hundred members, mostly al-Qaeda defectors." Whether by design or default this development has happened as a direct result of the aggression by the two countries on Yemen more than three years ago. This destructive war is ill-conceived, illegally waged and badly executed. The region has become more dangerous and unstable. The potential for the mushrooming of terrorism has greatly increased as terrorist groups expanded their presence under the protection of the aggressors.

The Saudi authorities have put together a collection of tweets, articles and past statements by the political detainees along with excerpts from answers they had given during interrogation (which may include statements made under duress). The aim is to use them in the production of a documentary aimed at making people fearful of activists, and justify their campaigns of repression. They have clustered the detainees into three groups. According to leaked information, one of the alleged groups has links with human rights NGOs and neighbouring states, and aims to overthrow the Saudi regime. The other group allegedly has links with the Muslim Brotherhood and aims to seize power in the country.

The third group is said to have a plan for the secession and independence of Hijaz Province.

There has been a public outcry against the criminal actions by Bahrain's dictator who has banished the most senior religious leader in the country. Ayatullah Sheikh Isa Ahmad Qassim was deported to UK on Monday 9th July. To make this possible the elderly Sheikh was "convinced" that he had an ailment that could only be treated at the University College Hospital in London. He was escorted to the airplane, accompanied by two of his children and given one year Bahraini passport. Two years ago his Bahraini nationality had been revoked and his house encircled by police for the whole period. His hometown, Duraz, has been under siege since then. Last year five of his followers were brutally killed by regime's forces when they stormed his house. His deportation is the latest of the Alkhalifa crimes against Bahrain's natives. The British role in propping up the regime has been questioned by several MPs and Peers.

Meanwhile regime's attacks on native Bahrainis have escalated. From Sanabis three youths were detained yesterday including Ali Al Sami'e. From the town of Northern Sehla two youths, Ali Yassin and Mahdi Ahmad were kidnapped from their father's house by masked members of regime's death squads. Four were detained from Daih Town in home raids: Mohammad Shakir, Sultan Isa, Ali AlQamar and Amjad Abdulla. Nidal Abdul Khaliq was detained yesterday in a vicious house raid on his home at Dar Kulaib town. In the early hours of Sunday 8th July Salman Jassim was snatched by ISIS-style masked members of Alkhalifa Death Squads in a raid on his home at the town of Shahrakkan. Another native Bahraini, Mohammad Jaffar was also detained. A third youth, Hussain Ali Jassim was detained on 5th July at the

police station after he had been summoned to appear there. Nothing has been heard of the three since their detention. On 5th July Woman activist Zakiya Al Barbouri was remanded in custody until 4th August. Regime's kangaroo court refused to release her on bail despite appeals for her health and the absurdity of the charges against her. She has languished in regime's torture dungeons since her abduction on 17th May. Bahraini youth, Sayed Kadhem Abbas has lost his sight after years of lack of care in the prison. His family has not received any news about him since he had been transferred to hospital to remove a tumour. Also the fate of Fadel Abbas is not known since his abduction from the town of Dair.

The financial crisis facing Alkhalifa tribal dictatorship is intensifying. It has led to the cancellation of an aircraft order for 10 Bombardier C-Series jets — an order they placed in 2011. The ruling tribe refuses to release financial results for Gulf Air, but its CEO said suffered losses each year, for the past several years.

Last week the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) called for the immediate release of Nabeel Rajab. FIDH President, Dimitris Christopoulos said: "Without proper treatment, Nabeel's health problems cause him great suffering. The choice of the Bahraini authorities is to maintain this suffering. Refusing him a proper medical care must be interpreted as a form of ill-treatment which deliberately endangers his life. We call on the chancelleries in Manama to put pressure on the authorities to ease this inhuman regime and allow Nabeel in receiving the care he requires. We ask them to demand his unconditional release, also requested by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the European Parliament."

Bahrain Freedom Movement
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were beaten up, abused physically and verbally and shackled. Two weeks ago about 100 inmates were taken out of their cells and forced to stand up under the sun for more than 3 hours. Many fainted.

The deteriorating health conditions at Bahraini prisons are causing alarm among the families of the political detainees. The dictator has adopted a policy of weaponising medical care to kill the two prisoners. Yesterday the prominent academic and thinker Dr Abdul Jalil Al Singace was denied a visit to hospital for his deteriorating health. He suffers from polio and uses crutches for all his movements. Since his incarceration 90 months ago he has suffered several ailments but has been denied necessary medical care. Mr Hassan Mushaima, one of the most prominent political leaders has not received treatment for his cancer for 14 months in addition to total isolation from his family whom he has not met for that period. Elias Al

Mulla is approaching a state of no return as he fights cancer and has been denied proper treatment. One of the most outrageous crimes has been committed by Alkhalifa dictator against Ayatullah Sheikh Isa Qasim. The elderly cleric who is the most senior religious scholar in the country and the who was one of the few survivors who had drafted the country's 1973 constitution has also been persecuted. For more than two years of house arrest he had not received proper medical care. At the start of the ordeal in May 2016 he was fit enough to attend prayers and address religious con-

gregation. The blockade imposed on his home included denying him proper medical care for his various ailments. He is now receiving treatment in London. The shameful failure of the regime's economic policies has been further confirmed by the International Monetary Fund. On 15th July the IMF said that Bahrain needed a comprehensive package of reforms to reduce its fiscal deficits over the medium term as the island kingdom seeks to secure crucial support from rich neighbors to avoid a currency devaluation. "Despite planned fiscal consolidation measures, fiscal and external deficits are projected to continue over the medium term, due to the large and growing interest bill," IMF's Executive Board said in a report on Sunday. "Public debt is expected to increase further over the medium term and reserves are projected to remain low."



Bahrain Freedom Movement
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UK spooks involved in controversial police training for dictatorship

Phil Miller
Jul 4 2018

British spooks appear to be involved in a controversial security assistance scheme for a despotic regime, VICE can reveal. The UK government is using a secretive pot of money to deliver classified programmes in Bahrain. The tiny island nation is one of Britain's closest allies in the Gulf and is controlled by the autocratic King Hamad. The scheme costs potentially over a million pounds and is part of a new "Integrated Activity Fund", endorsed by the Cabinet Office's National Security Council.

When a Bahraini human rights group made a Freedom of Information (FoI) request to ask how the money was spent, the UK Cabinet Office said that "due to the nature of the Integrated Activity Fund and all the Programmes being funded by it, the information requested relating to the Fund is exempt under section 23(1) as it relies on information supplied by, or relating to, bodies dealing with security matters".

Section 23 of the Freedom of Information Act says that any documents linked to Britain's spy agencies MI6, MI5 and GCHQ, as well as the special forces, should not be disclosed to the public. The Cabinet Office said in a letter that, "Section 23 is an absolute exemption and there is no requirement to conduct a public interest test." It added that releasing any other information about the scheme would damage diplomatic ties with Bahrain.

The news has troubled some parliamentarians, who say the UK government's relationship with Bahrain is becoming far too secretive. Lord Scriven, a Lib Dem peer, has asked the government why it suddenly stopped releasing details of its programmes in Bahrain.

For the last few years, Northern Irish police and prison consultants trained Bahraini officers under a scheme funded by the UK taxpayer, details of which were obtained through Freedom of Information requests, because the police are fair game for FoI requests. That scheme has now ended and instead it seems that British spies may have taken over this security assistance role, paid for by the new Integrated Activity Fund, and operating with less transparency, under an FoI exemption.

Lib Dem Peer Lord Scriven told VICE that he had "never known anything quite like this... the more you dig the more defensive and more opaque the government's answers become. I'm now of the opinion that Parliament hasn't been told the truth or the whole truth... somewhere along the line British security forces are involved in this particular scheme and the government doesn't wish that to be known. The government's relationship with the Bahrain authorities is far too

friendly and I think that's driven partly by the trade that we have with them, over military and arms sales. Brexit is on the horizon and they keep looking about for trade deals in the Gulf."

Bahraini human rights campaigners, many of whom live in exile in London, are also seriously concerned by the heightened secrecy around UK-Gulf relations. Sayed Alwadaei is advocacy director at the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (known more evocatively as "BIRD"). "This shows the shocking lengths that the government is going to avoid transparency," he said. "I'm alarmed by the nature of the current programme and how they are hiding it from the public and parliament. This level of secrecy is just to satisfy one of the most repressive regimes in the world." Mr Alwadaei, 31, has firsthand experience of the regime. His forehead is stamped with a distinctive scar, from when the police beat and tortured him during the Pearl Roundabout pro-democracy protests of 2011. Mr Alwadaei's mother-in-law is being held in Isa Town jail, where she is joined by other female political prisoners. Last Monday, a judge condemned another woman to Isa Town, after she was found guilty of inciting her fellow citizens to "overthrow the political and social systems".

The prisoner, Najah Ahmed Yousif, 41, is an unlikely revolutionary. A former civil servant in Bahrain's labour market regulatory authority, and a mother of four, she has spent the last year in pre-trial detention. Despite her ordinary middle class background, Ms Yousif has reasons to be angry. In 2012, her father-in-law, Mansoor Salman, suffocated to death after security forces fired vast quantities of tear gas into their neighbourhood. He was 85 years old. Footage from his funeral shows his coffin was draped in the Bahraini flag and thronged by mourners on its way to the grave.

Ms Yousif's crime is a series of alleged Facebook posts, partly speaking out against the Formula One Grand Prix. The famous race visits Bahrain each year and is a rare moment of international attention for an otherwise overlooked Gulf state, sandwiched between its larger neighbours Saudi

Arabia and Iran. When the judge sentenced her to three years in prison, she screamed and said to the court, "I am innocent! I told you in previous session, I was subjected to sexual assault, physical and psychological torture." The judge told her to be quiet.

Ms Yousif was referring to the moment when she was first arrested, back in April of 2017, and bundled away by the National Security Agency, Bahrain's equivalent of MI5. They took her to Muharraq police station, an imposing four-storey white-walled building, replete with faux turrets around the roof. It is tucked away behind a motorway, named after Bahrain's king, and looks on to a car wash. It is inside this building that Ms Yousif says she was beaten and sexually assaulted by Bahrain's spies. "They physically assaulted me, they tried to tear off my clothes, touched my sexual organs, threatened me with rape," she told her supporters.

While this interrogation was allegedly going on upstairs, the man officially in charge of the police station was Brigadier Fawaz Hassan Al Hassan. He is the most senior police officer in that district, and, as VICE reported, has visited the UK for training – paid for by the British taxpayer as part of a £16,000 course on "command and control". The Brigadier visited Belfast, where Northern Irish police officers gave him and five colleagues a crash course in how to manage protesters.

We only know about this because of documents obtained under FoI requests, which showed that it included sessions on water cannons, dogs and intelligence gathering. Despite this training, it seems that he has been unable to stop a torrent of abuse allegations emerging from Muharraq police station, some documented by UN experts. There is no suggestion that the Brigadier personally abused any suspects at Muharraq or ordered that any abuse should occur, but campaigners are concerned that as many as 15 people claim they were tortured in his police station last year.

When I asked the UK Foreign Office for a comment, an official spokesperson said the department "follow developments in the country closely, and are continuing to monitor the case of Najah Ahmed Yousif. We encourage those with concerns about treatment in detention to report these to the appropriate oversight body. The UK continues to encourage these bodies to carry out swift and thorough investigations into any such claims."

It is clear that the UK was already deeply involved with some of Bahrain's most controversial security units, and that relationship is only set to deepen behind a new veil of secrecy where FoI requests will no longer be able to penetrate. The Cabinet Office decline to comment.

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