

BAHRAIN

Issued by the "Bahrain Freedom Movement" to promote human and constitutional rights

UK's reversal of 50 years policy may impede democratisation

In order to assess the future of democratic change in the region, the balance of power must be evaluated. The foreign influence has big impact on this process. In the past century colonialists powers have played negative roles and were obstacles against democratic transformation. This influence has remained even after Britain decided to leave all areas East of Suez in 1971. Today the counter revolution forces remain the most significant deterrent against political reforms in the Arab World. Britain is especially significant as the most influential power in the Gulf even after its withdrawal. Whether it has really moved out or remained remains a matter of contention, as it wielded political power in the past half a century. Its forces were often used to quell popular uprisings in Aden, Oman and Bahrain and were instrumental in propping up the present dictatorships. Until today that policy has not changed. The statements uttered by UK's ministers at the Parliament confirm that tendency. The official answers to tens of questions from MPs about UK's policy in Bahrain have always been dismissive of the fact that its rulers are dictators and torturers.

In the past few years, Britain has indicated its decision to re-deploy East of Suez for the first time in fifty years. This is a U-turn on a policy that had been brought about by the dwindling power of the British Empire which once ruled many parts of the world and controlled the high seas. Given the history of the British presence in the Gulf, past and present, there remains little room for rational optimism that the UK will become a force for democracy and human rights. Its decision to leave the European Union has many implications. But one of the most rational explanation is that the British establishment has changed course in its strategy and intends to establish an international presence starting from the Gulf region. Leaving the EU will expose the UK to many difficulties, and it appears that the establishment had made up its mind and decided to continue supporting the Gulf monarchies without any hint of wielding pressure on them to democratise or respect human rights. Both notions were the most celebrated by the West soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Yet, almost thirty years after that event, those values have remained muted and side-lined

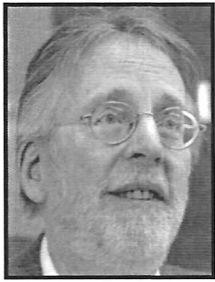
especially when it comes to relations to the GCC monarchies. For example, despite the Kashoggi's murder, the UK has remained faithful to the Saudi regimes, arming Riyadh to the teeth and supporting its war efforts in Yemen. Last month five British special forces were injured in a clash near Sa'da city, the hotbed of Ansarullah (the Houthis). There are loud voices to withdraw British forces from both Riyadh and Yemen. The war does not serve UK's interests, neither is a winning game. There are wider speculations that the Houthis would eventually defeat the Saudi-led forces and embarrass their Western supporters.

The UK has been preparing for wider military presence in the world. Since October HM Montrose has been sailing in the high seas after leaving its British bases. It sailed the whole Atlantic to the Bahamas, crossing the Panama Canal into the Pacific, Japan and Korea. During this long trip the officers aboard HM Montrose fought against drug dealers and traffickers. It is likely to carry out relief operations in the future and play a constructive role in the countries that are being targeted. The aim is to show the British might on the high seas as China prepares to play an international role as the main suppliers to the world. In recent years, the UK has increased its military budget despite the increasing pressures on its overall budget. Since its decision to widen its operational role on the world stage it has ordered two massive military aircraft carriers to be built at a cost in excess of £6 billion each. It has signed new defence pacts with the Sultanate of Oman and played arbitration role between Oman and the United Arab Emirates which has an ambitious expansionist policies. Five years ago the UK built the first marine base outside the UK since its withdrawal from the region in 1971.

The Brexit debacle will be the first major test to this new British strategy. After its withdrawal from the Gulf in 1971 it joined the European block (Known as the European Economic Community at the time) hoping to play a leading role in the continent. Now it is reversing that policy; withdrawing from the European Union to go back to the Gulf. When it joined the Saudi-led aggression on Yemen in March

2015 it was hoping to claim a leading role in what would have been a decisive victory. That would have made it the unchallenged force in the region and would have humbled the Saudi into submission to the British dominance. This has not happened after four years of relentless bombardment, enormous suffering and massive human and material destruction. Neither the Saudis, the UAE or the British can claim to have achieved real military or political victory or the moral high ground. On the contrary, the world is now demanding that the war on Yemen be ended sooner than later and that those who have participated must pay reparations to its inhabitants for their human and material losses. The bare-footed Yemenis have inflicted massive defeat on the armies that have imposed no restrictions on their criminality.

The UK may go back to new arrangements similar to those they had imposed prior to 1971, but what for? Who will accept them as a foreign power? Who wants to live against under colonial rule? Their military arrangements with the local monarchs will drag them into combating the pro-democracy activists and will not lead to their political or military dominance. To replace Europe with the GCC countries indicates the extent of hopelessness in the hearts and minds of the British strategists who continue to cling to the old empire era that had long gone. The UK's interests may only be secured by adopting realistic policies, working within Europe and upholding the human values enshrined in the various international laws and convention. The return to the pre-1971 strategy is going back in time and does not serve the future. The allies in the Gulf have not acted rationally, democratically or humanely when they waged various wars in Iraq, Syria, Bahrain and Yemen. Those regimes are doomed as they continue to cling to their tribal heritage and ignore the human developments in the realm of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The UK's insistence on taking part in the Saudi-led war on Yemen does not serve the interests of the British people who have come in recent weeks in their millions to remain with the EU. UK has never been in such a weak state before, it must change course.



Formula One Whitewashes Bahrain Repression

by Joe Stork
11th March 2019
Najah Yusuf, a 42-year-old mother of four, has been languishing in a Bahraini jail for nearly two years ever since intelligence officers

found messages on her cell phone promoting anti-government protests. At her trial, which in June 2018 resulted in a three-year prison sentence, the prosecution presented Facebook and Twitter posts of protests, including ones that urged people to participate in a “Stop Formula of Dictatorship” rally and “Freedom for the Formula 1 Detainees.” Bahrain has been on the Formula One circuit since 2004. The race became a target of anti-government protesters as political tensions grew in subsequent years. In 2011, the race was cancelled following the popular uprising that February and the martial law regime that followed. In 2013, masked security forces conducted arrest raids in homes near the Formula One circuit. Human rights groups say Bahrain has used its participation in international sporting circuits to offset its reputation for brutal political repression. As one international researcher put it, however, “the problem for Bahrain as it seeks to launder its image is that there is a lot to cover up.”

Yusuf has alleged that officers sexually assaulted and beat her over the course of five days of interrogation in late April 2017, and forced her to sign a confession that they would not allow her to read. The court ruling also cited social media posts that included photos and videos of other protests involving youths throwing

“Molotov cocktails” at security forces. Yusuf denied having posted these on the accounts, which had multiple administrators.

The court convicted her of advocating the “toppling and reformation of the political and social system” and “propagating terror crimes” by means of “propaganda recordings.” In addition, “she was in contact with a person in London and had sent them false news and information for them to share on satellite channels, which have indeed been broadcasted.”

“All of that,” the court ruling said, was “to defame the state, hurt its interests, distort the image of the kingdom abroad, inciting the non-appliance to law, promoting and inciting the change of the ruling regime through unlawful methods, and insulting the authorities in the kingdom of Bahrain.” In November 2018, at the behest of human rights groups, Formula One raised Yusuf’s case with Bahraini authorities. The government responded with the preposterous claim that it protects basic freedoms “robustly” and that “no one is detained for expressing their political views.” In February, 17 human rights groups urged Formula One to call publicly for Bahrain to drop all charges against Yusuf relating to her right to free expression, release her, and hold accountable any officers responsible for her ill treatment. Formula One responded that

following “dialogue” with Bahrain, “we were assured” that Yusuf’s detention, charges, and conviction “had nothing to do with peaceful protest around the Bahrain Grand Prix.” A government statement on March 6 reiterated that Yusuf “was charged and subsequently convicted by a court of terror offences.”

Bahrain’s Formula One this year is scheduled for March 28, so the Formula One folks have a few weeks to up their game with Bahrain’s ruling clique. They should take a page from the way FIFA, the international football association, and the International Olympic Committee responded to Bahraini soccer star Hakeem al-Araibi’s battle against extradition to Bahrain from Thailand on trumped-up criminal charges and likely torture. A top FIFA official, sustainability and diversity chief Federico Addiechi, attended al-Araibi’s extradition hearing in Bangkok.

If Formula One executives fail to respond, perhaps it will be time to reach out to other Formula One stakeholders—race-car drivers, car manufacturers, and fans—to emulate their football counterparts and insist that Formula One actually abide by its proclaimed commitment to “respecting international human right in its operations globally” and “conducting due diligence” to identify “actual or potential human rights impacts.” So far, Formula One has been dodging its responsibility by proceeding with this year’s race while Najah Yusuf remains in prison.

Joe Stork is chair of the advisory board of the Gulf Center for Human Rights and former deputy director of Human Rights Watch’s Middle East division.

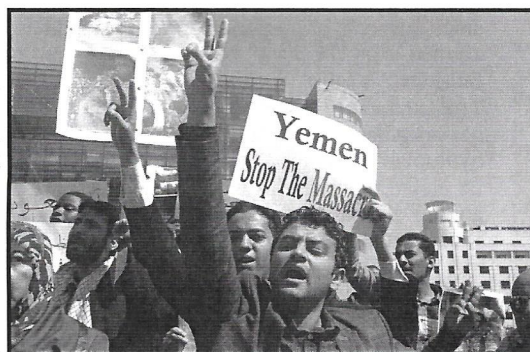


their opinion on Twitter.

In one of the largest mass trials in the history of Bahrain, 167 native Bahrainis were given sentences ranging between one and ten years for congregating outside the house of Ayatullah Sheikh Isa Qassim three years ago. Only a handful of them were acquitted. Amnesty International called for the immediate and unconditional release of all those convicted. Given that the result of this trial is a concrete and discouraging sign that Bahrain has made no movement towards loosening its clampdown on civil and political rights, Amnesty International also calls on the Human Rights Council to prioritize critical scrutiny of Bahrain’s record and on Council members to speak out against the ongoing repression there.

As international criticism against them mounts, Formula One bosses said on 13th March that they were committed to investigating the circumstances around the imprisonment of Mrs Najah Yusuf, who is serving a

three-year sentence for protesting against the Bahrain Grand Prix. Yusuf was sentenced after establishing several social media pages which denounced the political and social systems in Bahrain. During her trial in June 2018, Facebook posts from Yusuf criticising the 2017 Bahrain Grand Prix were featured prominently, although the Bahrain government has denied her comments about the race led to her conviction. Liberal Democrat, Lord Scriven said: “Anything less than a call for Najah’s im-



mediate and unconditional release will be a stain on the reputation of F1 and the Bahrain Grand Prix. It is time to act.”

On 19th March six UN experts expressed “serious concerns” for three Bahraini human rights defenders who have been routinely targeted by the Bahraini Government for their human rights activism, including their engagement with UN mechanisms. The experts reiterated their concerns for the criminalisation of freedom of expression in Bahrain and urged the authorities to investigate the allegations of abuse against the women. Hajer Mansoor Hassan, Ebtisam AlSaegh and Zainab AIKhamis have been imposed “travel restrictions, politically motivated charges, threats, including death threats and threats of sexual violence, and physical violence” as part of a broader campaign aimed to “prevent human rights defenders from carrying out their peaceful and legitimate work”, the experts said.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
20th March 2019

Cries for Saudi-led Yemen war to stop, F1 Bahrain race under fire

The fourth anniversary of the Saudi-led war on Yemen has become a focus for international efforts to bring it to an abrupt end. Yesterday tens of thousands of Yemenis marked the occasion with massive protests and rallies in several areas of the country especially the capital, Sanaa. Its leaders sounded defiant notes insisting that their country would resist the aggression and defeat the Saudi-Emirati-khalifi criminal alliance. The UK government is under pressure to stop arming the Saudis and withdraw their personnel who are aiding the aggressors. Yesterday, the Shadow Foreign Secretary, Emily Thornberry raised the stakes when she asked the government about British troops taking active role inside Yemen itself. Later she tweeted: "In the Commons today, I asked the government about weekend reports that British special forces have been involved in 'gun battles' in Yemen, despite repeated government statements that we are "not a party to the conflict" These queries arose after five members of the SBS (Special Boat Service) were wounded in the area of Sa'da in Northern Yemen. They were airlifted from the area but left behind many questions and theories about the nature of their work "behind enemy lines". Some suggested that they were on a mission to assassinate senior Yemeni figures, including Abdul Malik Al Houthi, the leader of Ansarullah Movement.

Five opposition parties in Westminster have called on the UK to end arms sales to Saudi Arabia on the fourth anniversary of the Yemen civil war, saying it has contributed to a catastrophic humanitarian crisis. The letter signed by leaders of the Labour party, Scottish National party, Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru and the

Green party, comes as a fragile truce negotiated in December hangs by a thread. Meanwhile Several US Senators have written to the Saudi monarch urging him to prosecute those responsible for the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi and release jailed activists. They called for the release of Dr Walid Fetaihi, Samar Badawi, Lujain AlHathloul and other activists. The democrat Senators considered the killing of Khashoggi, the Yemen war and the detention of the political and human rights activists "acts that undermine the regional role of Riyadh". Saudi Arabia is on course for a record number of executions including public beheadings in 2019 despite claims kingdom is 'modernising'. Executions are usually carried out by beheading but there also reported to have been crucifixions. The desert kingdom has already reportedly 43 people in the first three months of this year – the most recent being a Syrian man who was put to death on March 13 for smuggling amphetamine pills. If this rate continues, 172 will have been put to death by the end of the year, it was reported. The record for the number of executions carried out by Saudi Arabia was 158, according to human rights advocates Amnesty International.

As Formula 1 race gets underway in Bahrain international criticism has mounted as the organizers failed to act to stop people being persecuted as a direct result of the race. There were several demonstrations in the past few days calling for the race to be scrapped labelling it "Blood Formula". To ensure sports events don't contribute to human rights abuses, global businesses, and sports federations – including motor racing's footballing equivalent, FIFA – are increasingly adopting the United Nations Guiding Principles on

Business and Human Rights. This helps ensure they properly assess the human rights risks of their operations, and do not further fuel abuses. Formula One and FIA leaders should follow suit.

Twenty five NGOs have signed an open letter to the Formula One Group calling for concrete measures to safeguard human rights in Bahrain during race events. They have urged Formula One to use its substantial leverage to press Bahrain's authorities for change. They said: Bahrain already tried to export repression beyond its own borders this year when it sought to extradite its former national football player and torture survivor Hakeem al-Araibi from Thailand. After a global outcry the extradition bid failed, but Bahrain's abuses are a warning flag. It is time for Formula One to adopt and implement a human rights policy. And it should start by calling for woman activist Najah Yusuf to be freed ahead of the Grand Prix race on March 31. Mrs Yousuf is serving three years sentence for campaigning against "Blood Formula". In the past seven years several native Bahrainis were persecuted or killed for arguing against holding the race in Bahrain.

Yesterday khalifi regime ordered its courts to revoke the Bahraini nationality of six more natives. Another two unnamed Bahrainis were given ten years jail sentence and stripped off their nationality. These decisions bring the total number of native Bahrainis stripped off their nationality to 845. The vast majority of them were persecuted by the khalifis for their peaceful activism in their struggle for change in the country. Regime's courts rely on "confessions" extracted under torture for prosecution.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
27th March 2019

US Senate calls to stop arming Saudis as Khalifis jail hundreds of Bahrainis

On 13th March the US Senate voted 54-45 to end U.S. support for the Saudi-led war on Yemen. It is another strong rebuke of President Donald Trump's support for Saudi Arabia, which has been a point of tension with Congress since the death of journalist Jamal Khashoggi last year. Lawmakers from both parties have called for a reappraisal of the U.S.-Saudi relationship and accused Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of being involved in Khashoggi's murder, even as Trump has stood by the Saudi leader.

As the war on Yemen approaches its fourth anniversary more than quarter of a million people around the world have signed a petition asking their governments to stop selling arms to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Amnesty International took the initiative of handing the petition to the UK Government. Meanwhile Germany has extended the moratorium on arms exports to Saudi Arabia to the end of March.

The number of native Bahrainis arrested by the middle of March is more than 20. They include: Abdulla Ibrahim AlJareesh, Ali Jaffar Al Taitoon, Bowling athlete Mohammad Khalil, Hussain Ali Ahmad, Sayed Murtadha Khalil, Mohammad Sadiq Mirza, Taher Hani AlBanna, Tariq Abdul Nabi, Ayyoub AlKhabbaz, Shakier AlMuwali, Ali Habib AlShahrakani, Jalal Abdulla AlEthnaAshar, Hussain Ali Zain AlDin, Hani AlShuwaikh, Adel Mohammad Ali, Hassan Abd Ali, Sayed Nasser, Sayed Mohammad Sayed Aqeel and Ali Hussain Saeed. Most of them were accused of taking part in the peaceful sit-in outside Sheikh Isa Qassim's house in Duraz. A young native Bahraini youth is fighting for his life after one week of hunger strike. Osama AlSaghir decided to go on strike after his demands for proper medical treatment were denied. He had been shot at close range with a shotgun during Alkhalifa aggression on Sheikh Qassim's House in May 2017. He was

seriously injured, arrested and denied the necessary treatment for his wounds. His family has expressed serious concern for his life.

On 13th March Bahrain's dictator ordered one of his "courts" to jail a senior opposition figure for calling on Sudan's military dictator to leave after 30 years in office. Responding to news that a Bahraini court has sentenced the opposition leader Ebrahim Sharif to six months in prison for a tweet criticizing Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, Amnesty International's Middle East Research Director, Lynn Maalouf, said: "Ebrahim Sharif's trial and sentencing is simply the latest development in the Bahraini authorities' sustained and systematic repression against their own citizens. Bahrainis are being made to pay a hefty price for simply expressing their views. "It is flabbergasting that someone can be made to appear before a court and stand trial, let alone serve a sentence, for simply having expressed

Refugee footballer Hakeem al-Araibi becomes an Australian citizen

A few weeks ago, Hakeem al-Araibi had another restless night.

"I didn't sleep the night [before] the test," the Bahraini-born footballer and refugee said. "I know all the Australian laws now." He needn't have worried. Al-Araibi passed the final hurdle in his quest to become a naturalised Australian – the citizenship test – with a score of 100%, according to Craig Foster, the former Soccerero who led the public campaign to free Al-Araibi from a Bangkok prison.

On Tuesday, he was among 207 people from 44 countries who took a pledge or affirmation at Federation Square in Melbourne to become an Australian citizen.

"Finally, no country can follow me now because I am Australian," Al-Araibi said, moments after the ceremony. "Bahrain, please don't follow me. I am now 100% safe in this country."

Al-Araibi was arrested in November on an erroneously issued Interpol red notice while honeymooning in Thailand with his wife. Bahrain sought his extradition over vandalism allegations, which Al-Araibi has always denied.

At the height of campaign to have him released from prison, supporters had called on the home affairs minister, Peter Dutton, to grant Al-Araibi citizenship while he remained incarcerated.

The push was rejected, but as it turned out, Al-Araibi was freed anyway when Thailand dropped the extradition proceedings. He returned to Australia last month after 76 days in jail.

As the new citizens took the pledge, the camera phones in the hands of the diverse crowd of well-wishers went up to eye level, clicked and shuttered.

Hakeem Al-Araibi (second from right) receives his Australian citizenship during a ceremony at Federation Square in Melbourne. Photograph: David Crosling/AAP
The photos continued as a line snaked around the hall after the ceremony. New Australians were waiting for a happy snap with Al-Araibi and Foster.

"Few Australians, I guess, had to fight quite so hard to become a citizen," Foster said.

"Hakeem asked me just a couple of days ago, 'What do you think about my wife and her citizenship?'"

"And I said to him, 'She has to wait a further two years, Hakeem, because she hasn't been here long enough and there are requirements.' He said, 'I love Australia.' I said, 'Why? What do you mean?' And he said, 'Because there are laws, there are rules and they are always followed.'"

The foreign affairs minister, Marise Payne, who led the diplomatic efforts to secure Al-Araibi's release, said the campaign had "embodied some of the best aspects of Australia".

"It sends a thrill through my heart and my mind that you have chosen Australia," she

told the ceremony.

Prime minister Scott Morrison, Hakeem al-Araibi (centre) and Craig Foster at the Commonwealth Offices in Melbourne on Tuesday. Photograph: Daniel Pockett/AAP

Al-Araibi is yet to pull on the boots for his Melbourne football club, Pascoe Vale, which plays at a level one tier below the A-League. But he enjoyed a euphoric homecoming last month. He is back at training and is trying to regain his fitness after months away from the game. "Now I just want to rest in my house with my family," Al-Araibi said, reiterating his hope that he would one day play A-League.

Foster expressed a similar sentiment, but emphasised that "more importantly we just want him to recover as a person".

"In the fullness of time I'm sure he'll get back to playing football," he said.

"But we have told him, we fought so hard, it's up to you, now. You're an Australian citizen. In time, you're going to be eligible to play for Australia. We want to see you pulling on the green and gold. It's very much in your court."



Saudis criticized on Yemen crimes, Khalifis per-

As the fourth anniversary of the Saudi-Emirati led aggression on Yemen approaches the evil alliance has escalated its war crimes in a desperate attempt to score a "victory" which has so far eluded them. On 11th March indiscriminate air strikes by the Saudis killed at least 22 civilians, including women and children in a village in northern Yemen, the United Nations said. Medical sources said on Monday that the attacks in Kushar district, in Hajja Province, killed 10 women and 12 children and wounded 30 people, including 14 under the age of 18. "Many of the injured children have been sent to hospitals in Abs district and in Sanaa for treatment and several require possible evacuation to survive," the U.N. Coordinator in the country, Lise Grande, said in a statement.

Yesterday Amnesty International (AI) said that children as young as eight had been raped by militia fighters in the Yemeni city of Taiz. Suspected perpetrators include members of Saudi-led coalition-backed groups and other militias supported and armed by the United Arab Emirates. AI reported the families of the four boys as saying that their children had been assaulted over the past eight months, adding that they had reported the assaults to the Taiz Criminal Investigation Department, but they did not take action. "A pattern of impunity and reprisals has thus far discouraged families from reporting these incidents, especially since suspects are reported to be politically aligned with the local Islahi-controlled authorities," it said.

The car racing body running Formula One has been accused of "looking the other way" by human rights groups in the case of activist Najah Yousif who was beaten, sexually abused and jailed for protesting against the Bahrain Grand Prix in 2017. Her prosecutors presented Facebook and Twitter posts of protests, including ones that urged people to participate in a "Stop Formula of Dictatorship" rally and "Freedom for the Formula

1 Detainees." On 9th March a child was given six months jail sentence for joining anti-regime peaceful protest. Sayed Ali Taha has already spent three months in jail. On 8th March a member of Bahrain's Bowling Team, Mohammad Khalil, was arrested at the airport. He was on his way to take part in an international tournament in Abu Dhabi.

On 6th March Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action update calling on the Bahraini authorities to ensure that Hajer Mansoor Hassan's conviction and sentence are quashed, that she is immediately and unconditionally released, and that, pending her release, Hajer is granted access to adequate medical care as necessary and in a timely. On 25 February 2019, the Court of Cassation upheld Hajer Mansoor Hassan's conviction and three-year prison sentence. Since August 2018, Hajer has suffered from a lump in her breast, which she feared might be cancerous. The authorities did not inform her of the results of medical tests, including a mammogram, and ignored her repeated request to be referred to a specialist.

A refugee footballer who had fled Bahrain and was held in a Thai prison for months during a tense extradition standoff between Australia and the Khalifi dictators was yesterday granted Australian citizenship. "I'm an Aussie now," Hakeem AlAraibi told reporters in Melbourne after a citizenship ceremony on the banks of the Yarra River that flows through the city. "I'm very happy to be safe." Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who lobbied for his release from detention in Thailand, met Araibi after the citizenship ceremony and handed him the Australian flag lapel pin from his jacket. This development is a major diplomatic and moral defeat to the Khalifi regime.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
13th March 2019