

Bahrain and Libya: US-NATO Colludes with Islamic Extremism

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When thousands of Saudi armed forces and other contingencies from the Persian Gulf states poured into Bahrain on March 14 in tanks and armoured personnel carriers, the troops were invariably shown on state television news channels making V (victory) gestures.

Recent disturbing events during Bahrain's brutal crackdown against pro-democracy civilians, in particular the Shia Muslim population, are beginning to reveal a macabre meaning to the "victory" sought by Saudi-led forces: an all-out war of persecution against Shia, involving assassination, kidnapping of doctors, academics, bloggers and human rights activists, torture of detainees, mass worker sackings and destruction of Shia mosques.

No matter that the Shia in Bahrain (70 per cent of the indigenous population) are unarmed civilians.

To appreciate the ruthlessness of the ongoing crackdown against the mainly Shia-led pro-democracy movement, we have to understand that the Bahrain security forces (army and police) are predominantly made up of often extremist Sunni expatriates from other Arab countries, such as Jordan, Syria and Yemen, and also Pakistan and Balochistan. These forces are now combining with troops from Gulf states, mainly Saudi Arabia, in military operations to quell the Bahraini pro-democracy uprising that began February 14. What gives this campaign of repression an altogether more sinister import is the intense sectarian hatred of extreme Sunni towards Shia. This sectarian antipathy is seen elsewhere in the Arab world. It has been a recurring engine of violence during the ongoing US-led occupation of Iraq where many Shia mosques have been bombed, with countless loss of lives, by Sunni extremists associated with Al Qaeda – and most likely manipulated by Saudi Arabian, American and British intelligence.

It is no secret that Wahhabism – an ultra-conservative offshoot of Sunni Islam and the official state religion of Saudi Arabia – has almost a fanatical loathing of Shia Muslims, seeing the latter as "idolaters" and worse than "infidels". This Wahhabist virulent strain of Islam is central to the extremists of the Al Qaeda terror group that is strongly rooted in the Arabian Peninsula and indeed linked historically to the Saudi rulers. While Western governments are ostensibly in a "war on terror" with Al Qaeda, it is well documented that the governments of Saudi Arabia, the US and Britain, have at various times covertly supported and colluded with this network as a proxy for geopolitical goals, for example the destabilization of Iraq, and at other times as an enemy of convenience that has justified illegal wars of aggression against sovereign states in pursuit of natural resources. More recently, such shadowy liaison with Al Qaeda elements within the so-called Libyan rebel forces has been pointed out with regard to the ongoing US-NATO intervention in North

Africa.

Michel Chossudovsky writes: "The US-NATO coalition is arming the Jihadists. Weapons are being channeled to the LIFG [Libyan Islamic Fighting Group] from Saudi Arabia, which historically since the outset of the Soviet-Afghan war has covertly supported Al Qaeda. The Saudis are now providing the [Libyan] rebels, in liaison with Washington and Brussels, with anti-tank rockets and ground-to-air missiles." [1]

Bahrain appears to be the other side of the coin of this US/Western-Saudi/Al Qaeda pact. While Saudi Arabia (and other Gulf states, notably Qatar) are lending crucial diplomatic and material help to the Western imperialist intervention in Libya; on the other side of the coin, Saudi Arabia is being given a freehand to crush a civilian pro-democracy movement that emerged as a threat in its own backyard. And it is crushing the Shia population with a venom that stems not only from the urgent need to thwart the spread of democracy but also from a deep antipathy, one might even say pathological hatred, that the Wahhabists harbour towards Shia.

Going back to the gung-ho images of the Saudi invasion forces speeding across the causeway to Bahrain, one could have been forgiven for thinking that these troops from the Gulf Peninsula Shield task force were on a heroic mission to vanquish a formidable armed enemy that was killing civilians and plundering state institutions of the Bahraini state.

Declaring a state of emergency on March 14, the US-backed Bahraini Sunni ruler, King Hamad Al Khalifa, who is closely allied with the House of Saud, said the country was compelled "to take necessary measures to protect national security and people's safety... amid a serious security escalation".

Meanwhile, Abdul bin Hamad Al Attiya, the general secretary of the Gulf Cooperation Council, based in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, announced "all the nations of the GCC share the same destiny and it is therefore the region's collective responsibility to safeguard the security and stability of any one country".

Days later, on March 21, the two pro-government English-language newspapers in Bahrain, The Tribune and The Gulf Daily News, ran the following front page headlines: VICTORY, proclaimed the former; TERROR PLOT FOILED, asserted the latter. Both reported King Hamad saying: "An external plot has been fomented for 20 to 30 years... I hereby announce the failure of the fomented subversive plot," while receiving the commanders of the Peninsula Shield in Manama.

The bombastic rhetoric was of course partly designed to create a retrospective justification for the unprecedented military action against a peaceful, civilian movement; it also partly revealed the paranoid fear among Gulf rulers towards Iran, which being mainly Shia incurs the same sectarian loathing from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Sunni rulers. With centuries of common ancestral and religious heritage, the ordinary Shia of Bahrain and other Gulf countries have undoubtedly an affinity towards Iran. But to extrapolate this to present them as being willing agents of Iran is groundless and is more reflective of a Wahhabist loathing towards Shia in general, conflating these religionists into one homogenous enemy, figure-headed by the Ayatollahs in Iran.

Furthermore, such rampant rhetoric of treachery, serves to set the scene for a merciless crackdown on the Bahraini Shia – who are painted as a verminous entity that needs to be

extirpated. This antagonism towards the Shia by the Bahraini rulers is of course nothing new. Ever since the Al Khalifa family, who originated from central Arabia, was installed in Bahrain under the British Empire some 220 years ago, the Shia have long-held grievances of poverty, discrimination and disenfranchisement. The determination to crush the latest uprising by the Sunni elite bears the hallmark of vengefulness against a despised and downtrodden population that dared to mount a resistance. The country's prime minister, Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa (the uncle of the king) reputedly used to say: "The Bahraini Shia are like a Persian rug; the more they are walked on, the better they become." In the aftermath of the uprising, the prime minister has vowed ominously that "those who tried to subvert national unity will be held to account". With widespread repression now unfolding against Shia, it is unmistakable that the entire Shia population is being held to account.

While Iran was not explicitly mentioned in initial sensationalist accounts of subversive plots, several subsequent statements by the Bahraini and Gulf governments have openly accused Tehran of "interfering in the internal affairs of Gulf states". The claim of Iranian interference in Bahrain's pro-democracy uprising was also asserted by US secretary of state Hillary Clinton on March 19 while attending a conference in Paris to garner support from Gulf states for the impending NATO bombing of Libya. While praising the role of the Gulf Arab states in backing NATO's plans for intervention in Libya, Clinton said: "We share the view that Iran's activities in the Gulf, including its efforts to advance its agenda in the neighbouring countries, undermines peace and stability."

In all these lurid assertions, not one shred of evidence of alleged Iranian interference – material or political involvement – has been produced to support such claims. But what these claims have served to do is provide a pretext for invoking the supposedly protective forces of the Gulf Peninsula Shield to "save the national security and stability" of Bahrain and, by extension, the other Gulf states. The spurious, bellicose claims of an external malevolent mastermind colluding with "an enemy within" also serves to give a political cover for the egregious repression of the Bahraini Shia and what amounts to clear crimes against humanity.

So what have been the results of the measures to "secure stability and order" in Bahrain that the arrival of the Saudi-led forces nearly four weeks ago was supposed to achieve?

Needless to say there have been no gun battles with armed combatants, no Saudi helicopter gunships shot down with Iranian-supplied weaponry, no amphibious Iranian seacraft being blown out of the water by the brave V-gesturing soldiers of the Saudi army.

On the contrary, the "results" speak volumes: over 20 unarmed civilians have been killed, some such as Ahmed Farhan (31), from Sitra, shot in the head at point-blank range by Saudi soldiers. [2] Over 600 civilians have been detained without charge in unknown conditions, including doctors, lawyers, human rights workers, academics and youth bloggers. Four civilians have died in custody showing signs of torture, the latest being named as Abdul Kareem Fakhrawi, the owner of an Islamic bookshop in Manama. Over 1,000 Shia workers have been sacked without any unemployment insurance from major industries, including state-owned petroleum company, BAPCO, the aluminium producer, ALBA, APM Terminals, Gulf Air, and state-owned telecoms firm Batelco. Teachers and students have been expelled from schools and universities. Invariably, the victims of this persecution are Shia – all labelled "disloyal" by the regime.

In addition, and significantly, dozens of Shia mosques and cemeteries have been attacked by the array of pro-state forces. The destruction has escalated since the Gulf Peninsula Shield entered Bahrain. Saudi troops have been prominently involved in bulldozing these Shia mosques, some of them dating back hundreds of years. One such is the Al Saboor mosque in Zinj, which is believed to be over 800 years old, now reduced to rubble. It is a bitter irony that when Saudi forces first entered Bahrain, their main duty was said by the Saudi government to function in a defensive role to “guard and secure vital installations”. The destruction of Shia mosques in Bahrain clearly shows that the real agenda for Saudi forces is more akin to “ethnic cleansing” that stems from a Wahhabist hatred towards Shia – the same mentality of sectarian destruction that was also most likely used for geopolitical motives by Saudi Arabia, the US and Britain in Iraq. [3]

While the US-NATO continues its \$1 billion-a-month bombing campaign in Libya out of “humanitarian concern”, these same powers have shown themselves inactive and inarticulate about crimes against humanity in Bahrain – crimes committed against an unarmed, civilian population. The US in particular has declined to even pretend to urge restraint against Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states in their blood-filled sectarian repression against Bahraini Shia civilians.

As with Libya, Bahrain provides an example of Western moral bankruptcy and how the US and Western governments can easily accommodate themselves with Islamic extremists, including their supposed arch-enemy, Al Qaeda, whenever and wherever needs must.

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NOTES

[1] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=24096>

[2] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=24252>

[3] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=967>

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