

Bahrain: Washington and London Endorse Dialogue With Tyrants, War Criminals and Torturers

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Global Research, July 20, 2011

20 July 2011

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#)

Efforts by the US and British-backed Bahraini regime to repair its international image over human rights violations are in tatters with the revelation that senior members of the oil kingdom's royal family have been personally involved in torturing hundreds of civilian detainees, including doctors and nurses.

One of the torturers-in-chief is Captain Nasser Al Khalifa, son of the king. He graduated this year "with honours" from the US Marine Corps University at Quantico, Washington.

This criminal rule by inner-circle members of the House of Al Khalifa also exposes Washington and London's efforts to positively talk up reforms and dialogue by their Persian Gulf ally as a cynical sham. In Libya and Syria, war and sanctions are declared against alleged human rights abusers. But in Bahrain, Washington and London say pro-democracy protesters must embrace the rulers' so-called initiative for national dialogue.

Revelations of royal family brutality in Bahrain also make a mockery of King Hamad's announcement last month of an "independent" human rights probe into violations that took place during the Western-backed Saudi-led military invasion of the oil-rich kingdom earlier this year.

Yet again Washington and London had trumpeted this move as a positive step to reform in the Gulf kingdom, where a minority unelected Sunni elite has ruled over a majority Shia population for 40 years since nominal independence from Britain in 1971.

But how can such a regime be taken seriously for investigating crimes against humanity when the perpetrators of those crimes are senior members of the regime? Since the popular and peaceful uprising against the US and British-backed monarchy began in mid-February, nearly 40 unarmed civilians have been killed by state forces. The head of the armed services is Supreme Commander King Hamad.

The king's other son by his second of four marriages, Shaikh Khalid, is also named as being personally involved in meting out torture to prisoners. Shaikhs Khalid and Nasser are half brothers of Crown Prince Salman, who was greeted in Washington by President Barack Obama last month when he announced Bahrain's "national dialogue" and "political reforms".

The Crown Prince told media then after his White House meeting: "I fully share the President's outlook concerning respect for universal human rights and the continuance of Bahrain's process of meaningful reform."

In stark contrast to such rhetoric about respecting universal human rights, many former Bahraini detainees described to Global Research a litany of brutalities that they endured at the hands of senior members of the Al Khalifa regime. The victims have told how they were punched, kicked and whipped and made to stand for days continuously without sleep. If they fell over from exhaustion, they would be kicked and punched and forced to resume standing.

Prisoners were routinely blindfolded, electrocuted, suspended from ceilings with handcuffs, or trussed like chickens on a metal pole and left to hang for prolonged periods. In many instances, former inmates said they or members of their families were threatened with rape if they did not sign confessions to scripted crimes.

Most of the torture is believed to have taken place in the underground cells of the Ministry of Interior headquarters – al Qala – in the capital, Manama. The king's sons were present during interrogations and were personally involved in torture sessions, according to former detainees in independent testimonies. Other members of the Al Khalifa entourage are accused of participating in gross maltreatment of prisoners. They include high-ranking officers in the Bahrain Defence Forces.

One senior royal family member in particular with blood on her hands is Shaikha Noura Al Khalifa, who is a Ministry of Interior officer. Her precise relation to King Hamad is not clear, but she is one of the regime inner-circle. She is said to have overseen the torture of female detainees, including teachers, students, doctors and nurses.

One released female detainee told how she was blindfolded, beaten on the head and verbally abused. "I was called a dirty Shia whore," she said.

The former detainee said her interrogators would refer deferentially to the torturer-in-chief present in the room by her royal title "shaikha". At one point, the prisoner's blindfold slipped off and she said she recognised the royal.

Other former female prisoners told how they were subjected to similar physical and mental trauma conducted by Shaikha Noura. Bahraini prison sources have told Global Research that the 20-year-old female poet Ayat Al Qurmezi, who was released last week from a one-year sentence, was also subjected to torture by the same royal.

Among the degradations suffered by the young poet were repeated threats of rape and a toilet brush was forced into her mouth – presumably as retribution for a poem recited at a pro-democracy demonstration in February when she criticised the Sunni rulers.

Ever since the US and Britain gave the green light to the Saudi-led invasion of Bahrain on 14 March, over 1,500 civilians – mainly from the majority Shia community – have been detained without trial. Four people have died in custody from torture, including journalist Karim Fakhrawi, according to the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights [1].

Other rights groups, such as Amnesty, Human Rights Watch, Front Line Defenders and Human Rights First, have testified that torture of detainees is routine and pervasive.

In a report out this week, Human Rights Watch condemned the Bahraini regime for systematic torture against dozens of medical professionals in particular [2].

More than 70 medics have been arrested; 48 are being prosecuted with charges that can only be described as ludicrous, such as “inciting hatred against the rulers”. If found guilty, the medics are facing 20-year prison sentences. The defendants include internationally respected senior surgeons Ali Al Ekri, Ghassan Dhaif and Basim Dhaif. They were trained at the Royal College of Surgeons Ireland, in Dublin. Disgracefully, the RCSI has remained silent about the violation of their members, owing to its vested financial interests with the Al Khalifa regime [3].

All of the detained medics have been subjected to torture and coerced into signing confessions. The female royal, Shaikha Noura, has overseen and conducted the abuse of female medics as well as other female prisoners, according to prison sources.

King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, the head of state, has in recent weeks announced a raft of seeming concessionary initiatives, including: the end of martial law courts along with the end of a state of emergency; a process of national dialogue for reconciliation and reform; and an independent probe into allegations of human rights violations.

The moves by the ruler of the oil-rich kingdom, where the US Navy Fifth Fleet is based, have been enthusiastically endorsed by Washington and London. “We welcome the recent positive developments,” said Michael Posner, the US administration’s human rights envoy on a visit to Manama last month.

However, evidence that members of the ruling family have been personally involved in torturing detainees, suspected of supporting a peaceful pro-democracy movement, suggests that the regime’s initiatives are a cynical public relations exercise.

That Washington and London have both endorsed the Al Khalifas’ “dialogue and reform efforts” points to an equally cynical attempt by these Western governments to give cover to their client regime. The question has to be asked: how can pro-democracy parties in Bahrain be seriously expected to have a conversation about reforms with tyrants, criminals and torturers?

Calls for indictments at the International Criminal Court would be more appropriate.

A more pertinent question perhaps over Bahrain is: how can anyone really take Washington or London serious about their avowed commitment to democracy and human rights?

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Notes

[1] <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/3921>

[2] <http://www.hrw.org/node/100587>

[3] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=24449>

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Finian Cunningham has written extensively on international affairs, with articles published in several languages. Many of his recent articles appear on the renowned Canadian-based news website [Globalresearch.ca](#). He is a Master's graduate in Agricultural Chemistry and worked as a scientific editor for the Royal Society of Chemistry, Cambridge, England, before pursuing a career in journalism. He specialises in Middle East and East Africa issues and has also given several American radio interviews as well as TV interviews on Press TV and Russia Today. Previously, he was based in Bahrain and witnessed the political upheavals in the Persian Gulf kingdom during 2011 as well as the subsequent Saudi-led brutal crackdown against pro-democracy protests.

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