

Britain's Royal Wedding Fiasco and its "Dirty little Secret" in Bahrain

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The British royal wedding is turning swiftly into a public relations disaster, with news that Bahrain's Crown Prince is respectfully turning down his invitation to the event because of the "situation reigning" in the Persian Gulf kingdom.

However, the real story behind the headlines is that the diplomatic shuffle reveals that the British establishment is well aware of the vicious repression being conducted by the Bahraini rulers along with the armed forces of neighbouring Gulf states, including Western allies Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman.

Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa reportedly said that that he did not want his presence to "tarnish" the royal wedding due to take place at Westminster Abbey in London this Friday.

The Bahraini prince was among 40 monarchs from around the world who have been invited by the British establishment to join some 2,000 other guests, including government leaders and celebrities, at the nuptials of Prince William and his long-time fiancé Kate Middleton. William is the son of Britain's heir to the throne, Prince Charles.



Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa

The British royals were in recent days coming under fire in some of the UK press for inviting the Bahraini prince, who is also the deputy supreme commander of the Bahrain Defence Forces.

Despite a lack of coverage in the British and Western mainstream media generally, nonetheless there has been a public outcry in Britain over the brutal crackdown on the pro-democracy movement. More than 30 civilians have been killed in state violence - which escalated on March 16 after Saudi-led forces from the other Gulf countries entered the diminutive island of some 700,000 indigenous population.

Thousands others have been injured from army and police opening fire on peaceful protests. Up to 1,000 people have been unlawfully detained, or "disappeared", including doctors, nurses, lawyers, human rights workers and bloggers. Four people, including Bahraini journalist Karim Fakhrawi [1], have died while in custody, showing signs of torture. The Shia majority in Bahrain is particularly targeted by the Sunni rulers and their Gulf allies. Hundreds have been sacked from workplaces, accused of being supportive of the anti-government uprising that began on February 14.

While the ongoing violations, including the military take-over of hospitals and unlawful detention of injured patients, have elicited condemnations from the UN Committee on Human Rights, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Doctors Without Borders and the US-based Physicians for Human Rights, the British government, along with Washington and other Western governments, has been conspicuously muted.

Bahrain's former colonial ruler, Britain, and the US government are well aware of the repression. The US Fifth Fleet is based in the strategic Persian Gulf island, which serves as a listening and watching post for Western geopolitical power projection in the region, in particular against Iran. It beggars belief that Western governments are unaware of the repression. Indeed, it is most likely that these governments have given their approval to the Bahraini and Gulf rulers carrying out the crackdown on the pro-democracy movement and the Shia population generally.

Only days before the Saudi-led forces moved into Bahrain, the Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa received separate personal visits from US secretary of defence Robert Gates and Britain's top national security advisor Sir Peter Ricketts, the latter reporting directly to British prime minister David Cameron.

Britain and the US are major suppliers of military equipment to Bahrain – including teargas, helicopters and armoured personnel carriers that are being deployed to crush the pro-democracy protests.

Britain has a particularly important role in the repressive policies of the Bahraini regime. When Britain granted nominal independence to the oil-rich shajkhdom in 1971, many of the British state security personnel remained in place. The head of Bahrain's security between 1968 to 1998 was Colonel Ian Henderson, who is believed to still act as an advisor to the king. Henderson has in the past been the subject of several reports by international human rights groups for his involvement in overseeing torture and repression in Bahrain. [2]

Since the latest crackdown began, the Bahraini rulers and their Gulf allies have sought to legitimize the state of emergency declared on March 14 as a necessary measure to crush a "subversive plot" in the country and the region fomented by Iran. US secretary of state Hillary Clinton has endeavoured to shore up such claims by denouncing "Iranian interference".

But as the British royal wedding fiasco indicates, Britain (and the US) are acutely aware of the disturbing humanitarian concerns in Bahrain.

Officially, the Bahraini Crown Prince "uninvited" himself. In a statement, he said: "I was hoping that the Kingdom of Bahrain would have a high-profile representation at this glamorous event, thus reflecting the friendship bonding our countries. However, the current situation reigning in Bahrain prevents me from attending."

The bets are that the British foreign office became alarmed at the growing media controversy in Britain over the planned attendance at the wedding by the Bahraini monarch and advised the latter to uninvite himself.

If the British government really did believe the official justifications for the repression in Bahrain, it would not have made such a move. The Bahraini monarch's wish not to tarnish the occasion seems to be an off-guarded, inadvertent admission that there are disturbing

violations being perpetrated by the regime. And the British government knows full well that it is harbouring a dirty little secret in Bahrain and that more media delving could expose that.

But the British establishment has not limited the damage entirely. Still planning to attend the royal wedding is one of the princes from the House of Saud. Which will bring up more questions about Britain's connections to the repression in Saudi Arabia against its own pro-democracy movement as well as the latter's ongoing involvement in Bahrain.

Furthermore, the guest list points to cynical double standards in Britain's foreign policy. As media analyst Paul Kane points out: "It is so telling, on so many different levels, for example, the contrast between Bahraini rulers, who get invited to the British royal wedding - something that is taken to epitomize and define the gentility and nobility and cultural achievement of the western elites - and Libyan rulers, who get munitions, presumably loaded with depleted uranium, on their heads."

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NOTES

[1] <http://www.cpj.org/killed/2011/karim-fakhravi.php>

[2] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=23619>

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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

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