

# Lethal crackdown in Bahrain is “Made in the US”

## Further unrest in Yemen

David Walsh  
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A savage attack by police on peaceful demonstrators, many of them sleeping, in the center of Bahrain’s capital Manama early Thursday morning (approximately 3:30 a.m.) left at least six and perhaps more dead, dozens wounded and 60 missing. After firing tear gas in large quantities, hundreds of police waded into the crowd, swinging clubs and firing pellets from shotguns.

Given the strategic importance of Bahrain to Washington and the close links of the Bahraini intelligence and military apparatus with that of the US, there is every reason to believe that this murderous assault was carried out with the knowledge—and at the urging—of the Obama administration and American military.

Hadeel Al-Shalchi of the Associated Press described the early morning raid: “In the surprise assault, police tore down protesters’ tents, beating men and women inside and blasting some with shotgun sprays of birdshot.”

A protester told CNN the police came in with no warning: “We were sleeping,” he said. “There were guys, kids, schoolchildren, women, and suddenly they just attacked us with tear gas, stun bombs.” The *New York Times* reported, “Men, women and young children ran screaming, choking and collapsing as riot police ringed the square.”

Dr. Sadek Al-Ikri, 44, told AP he was tending to sick protesters when the police launched their attack. “He said he was tied up and severely beaten, then thrown on a bus with others. ‘They were beating me so hard I could no longer see. There was so much blood running from my head,’ he said. ‘I was yelling, ‘I’m a doctor. I’m a doctor.’ But they didn’t stop.’ ...

“Al-Ikri said he and others on the bus were left on a highway overpass, but the beatings didn’t stop. Eventually, the doctor said he fainted but could hear another police official say ... ‘Stop beating him. He’s dead. We should just leave him here.’”

Manama hospitals described receiving a stream of wounded, some of them critically injured, Thursday morning. The AP’s Al-Shalchi reported: “At least one of the dead was peppered with bloody holes from pellets fired from police shotguns.

Nurses rushed in men and women on stretchers, their heads bleeding, arms in casts, faces bruised. At the entrance, women wrapped in black robes embraced each other and wept.”

At Salamaniya hospital, where most of the casualties were sent, “complete, uncontrolled chaos” prevailed, according to CNN’s Nic Robertson. Al Jazeera commented, “Patients include doctors and emergency personnel who were overrun by the police while trying to attend to the wounded.”

Later on Thursday, the Bahraini authorities announced a ban on gatherings and claimed they had “key parts” of the capital under control. Dozens of armored vehicles were reportedly deployed at the Pearl Roundabout, the location of the erstwhile protest encampment. There were accounts of scattered clashes throughout Manama and the use of tear gas in numerous neighborhoods.

The media reports that the crowds outside the hospital were markedly more militant and uncompromising than at previous rallies in Bahrain, which have been relatively peaceful. “They think they can clamp down on us, but they have made us angrier,” Makki Abu Taki, whose son was killed in the police attack, told AP. The *Times* reported that “hundreds of protesters” shouted “Death to Khalifa, death to Khalifa,” referring to Bahrain’s King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa.

Bahraini authorities were unapologetic about the numerous deaths and dozens of life-threatening injuries inflicted early Thursday morning.

Speaking to reporters later in the day, Foreign Minister Khalid Al Khalifa said that while the fatalities in Manama’s central square were “regrettable,” the repression had been necessary, reports AP, because protesters “were pushing the Sunni-ruled, Shiite-majority nation to the ‘brink of the sectarian abyss’ and ‘polarizing the country.’”

In fact, one of the striking elements of Bahrain’s wave of protests, remarked upon by numerous observers, has been the unity of anti-government Shiites and Sunnis in this small island nation.

Leaving aside public relations, the Obama administration fully backs the Bahraini regime. The formulaic and hypocritical comments of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in the aftermath

of the incident, expressing “deep concern,” can be dismissed as an attempt to divert attention from the US government’s criminal role in the affair. President Barack Obama did not even issue a pro forma statement condemning the official violence, as he did in response to events in Egypt.

A Pentagon spokesman, Col. Dave Lapan, in a statement following the police attack, referred to the American military’s central preoccupation: “As a long-time ally and home to the U.S. Navy’s Fifth Fleet, Bahrain is an important partner and the Department is closely watching developments there.”

In a related development this week, underscoring the strategic significance of naval predominance in the oil-rich region, Iran’s plans to send two warships through Egypt’s Suez Canal evoked denunciations from Israeli officials and more cautious statements from the Obama administration.

Israel’s foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman warned that his country could not “forever ignore these provocations.” At the U.S. State Department, spokesman P.J. Crowley said Wednesday the United States was monitoring the two Iranian ships. The Iranian government later cancelled its request to the Suez Canal Authority.

The US and Western media have warned repeatedly in recent days about the danger that political upheaval in Bahrain represents to imperialist geopolitical interests, warnings that read very much like incitements to repression.

Alan Silverleib, at CNN.com, spelled it out explicitly February 17, describing Bahrain as “a tiny group of islands where hot political rhetoric meets cold military reality. As far as Washington is concerned, this small Persian Gulf kingdom may be where support for Middle East democracy dies. The loss of American military power that would accompany an overthrow of the regime of King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa is incalculable.”

Silverleib quotes Michael Rubin, of the American Enterprise Institute, who describes Bahrain as “our most important strategic asset in the Persian Gulf” and notes that the Obama administration is “not being too vocal on the riots in Bahrain because it’s pretty much the one country where we can’t afford regime change.”

According to the US State Department, in a January 2011 background note, “U.S. military sales to Bahrain since 2000 total \$1.4 billion.”

A December 2009 US embassy cable, released by WikiLeaks (and published in the *Guardian* February 15), reported that the Bahrain National Security Agency “routinely shares high-quality intel [intelligence information] and seeks out joint operations opportunities” with its US counterparts. The cable noted that BNSA director Sheikh Khalifa bin Abdallah Al Khalifa “unabashedly positions his relationship with the U.S. Intelligence Community above all others, insisting that his key lieutenants communicate openly with their U.S. liaison partners and actively seek new avenues for cooperation.”

The practical results of this cooperation could be seen

Thursday morning at Salamaniya hospital and its morgue.

## Further violent clashes in Yemen

Meanwhile, protests grew more intense in Yemen Thursday, as demonstrators opposed to US-backed President Ali Abdullah Saleh took to the streets for the seventh straight day. In the capital Sana’a they were once again set upon by pro-government forces, wielding stones and weapons.

In Yemen’s southern port city of Aden, police fired on a crowd of several thousand protesters, killing at least one and wounding ten others. According to News Yemen, the demonstration in the Mansoura district demanded that Saleh step down and corrupt officials leave the country. The crowd chanted, “No to oppression, no to corruption, the people demand the fall of the regime,” wrote Reuters.

News Yemen also reported that in Taiz, in southwestern Yemen, thousands of youthful demonstrators rallied in opposition to Saleh and vowed to make February 18 a “day of rage.” The crowd shouted, “Down with the regime, down with the oppressors.”

In downtown Sana’a, anti-Saleh demonstrators were violently attacked by pro-Saleh elements, some of them armed with guns. The *Washington Post* reported that “protesters hurled rocks at one another while chanting slogans, engaging in a raucous seesawing struggle to control the street. They set fire to tires and garbage bins, sending dark plumes of smoke billowing into the sky. Guns were fired in the air numerous times, but no police or security forces were present to stop the mayhem.” Some 40 people were injured.

The *Post* cited the comments of Abdullah Hassan, a 32-year-old unemployed man injured in the street fighting: “Ali Abdullah Saleh must go ... The government is targeting its own people.” Opponents of the government allege their adversaries have been paid by the regime or transported to the capital by pro-Saleh tribal leaders.

In Sana’a, student protester Salah Abdullah told Reuters, “We won’t stop until this regime falls. We’ve been patient long enough.”



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