

# Support for Al-Khalifa, Western strategy to project power in Persian Gulf

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TEHRAN, Jan. 29 (MNA) – Canadian Human Rights Attorney Edward Corrigan rejected the ‘muted’ protests of the United States, Great Britain and other Western powers against the human rights violation in Bahrain as appalling.

Bahrain’s human rights climate remains highly problematic. The country’s courts convict and imprison peaceful dissenters and have failed to hold officials accountable for torture and other serious rights violations.



Edward Corrigan said Western countries are more concerned about their strategic alliance with the Al-Khalifa regime than about human rights or the wishes of the majority of the population in Bahrain.

He warned if the population of Bahrain explodes in anger over the repression and discriminatory treatment, it will put in jeopardy the presence of the United States and Britain, given their long history of support for the Al-Khalifa dictatorship.

“Strategic relationship with the Al-Khalifa regime is due to its strategic location of Bahrain which allows the United States and Britain to project their power in the Persian Gulf area,” Corrigan noted in an exclusive interview with Mehr News Agency:

**What is the outcome of Bahraini government’s suppression of pro-democracy activists? How do you evaluate the role of international community in countering the crimes and torture in Bahrain?**

The brutal repression of peaceful marchers who are protesting the execution by firing squad of the three young activists is only going to intensify the resistance to the Al-Khalifa regime. If the regime does not allow peaceful protest and recognize the right to free speech and address the concerns of the majority Shia population there will be more violence. If one

suppresses peaceful protest then it makes it inevitable that violent protest will result if there is no other alternative.

In September 2016 in a joint statement signed by 35 countries, the UN Human Rights Council expressed serious concern about human rights violations in Bahrain including imprisonment of those exercising their rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association, and lack of accountability.

In response to the executions the international community has been more vocal in their criticism. The United Nations Human Rights Commissioner issued a harsh rebuke saying that it was appalled by the executions. The UN Commission said they had "serious doubts whether the accused were provided with the right to have a fair trial."

The UN Committee was extremely critical of the trials and executions. In a Press Release they wrote: "We are appalled at the execution by firing squad of three men in Bahrain on Sunday. The men had been convicted of a bombing in Manama in 2014 that killed three police officers. They were found guilty after being allegedly tortured into making false confessions and their lawyers were not given access to all the evidence against them nor allowed to cross-examine prosecution witnesses during court hearings."

They were joined by the United States who said they were "concerned" about the executions. France also condemned the executions. Great Britain and the European Union deplored the use of the death penalty in this situation. Many other countries including Iran, and Iraq strongly condemned the executions of what they called "political" prisoners.

Here is what Human Rights Watch wrote about the trials: "The UN Human Rights Committee, which interprets the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Bahrain has ratified, has said that "in cases of trials leading to the imposition of the death penalty scrupulous respect of the guarantees of fair trial is particularly important and that any death penalty imposed after an unfair trial would be a violation of the right to life. Human Rights Watch opposes the death penalty in all circumstances because of its inherent cruelty."

Amnesty International has made similar criticism of the trials and called them "unfair" and they noted that the confessions were based on torture. The trials did not meet the required international standards.

## **How do you analyze the role of other countries, including US and UK, in raising tensions in Bahrain resulting in human rights abuses?**

The muted protests of the United States, Great Britain and other Western powers is appalling. They are more concerned about their strategic alliance with the Al-Khalifa regime than about human rights or the wishes of the majority of the population in Bahrain. Britain has a military presence in Bahrain which they wish to protect. The United States 5th Fleet is based in Bahrain. The Americans also provide other support. In June 2016, the US government lifted its embargo on arms sales to the Bahrain National Guard and Bahrain Defense Forces. In August 2016 approved an US\$150 million deal to supply military aircraft parts, ammunition and communications equipment to Bahrain. These actions reward the Manama regime for its violation of human and political rights.

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## **Why human rights pretenders like the US and UK not only are silent against Bahraini government curtailing freedoms of expression, association and assembly and cracking down on dissent, but also provide the country with financial aids?**

Again it is the perceived "strategic relationship" with the Al-Khalifa regime and the strategic location of Bahrain which allows the United States and Britain to project their power in the Persian Gulf area that dominates the thinking of the Western Powers. The importance of oil and the ongoing support of the British, and now the Americans, for the monarchical dictatorships in the Persian Gulf region necessitates a military presence to prop up the autocratic feudal regimes in the area. There is a realization on the part of the West that if they did not support the Persian Gulf States with weapons, money and military force if needed, these regimes would collapse given their precarious nature.

## **Do you think the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF)- a financial pool worth more than £1bn a year- is evidence of the militarization of Britain's development budget and UK complicity in abuses?**

Yes. This budget is largely without oversight and is controlled by the Conservative British government at the present time. There has been funding to Bahrain in the amount of two

million pounds. It does appear that this fund is being used to support dictatorships and not development.

**Many activists, NGOs and Human rights campaigners in Bahrain, like the Labor party in Britain, complain about the lack of transparency surrounding how the reserves are spent and about a high degree of ambiguity about the status of the CSSF fund. What do you think about this?**

This money is reportedly to help Bahrain to improve its justice system and to improve human rights in the tiny Persian Gulf monarchy. However, as critics have pointed out that the justice system in Bahrain is getting much worse. Torture is being used against prisoners and being used to convict activists with some receiving the death sentence. In addition there is violent suppression of peaceful demonstrators, the killing of unarmed demonstrators and the revocation of citizenship from more than 200 Bahrainis. Freedom of speech and political rights are under severe attack in Bahrain. There have been calls in Britain by the Labor Opposition and by human rights groups to stop sending money to Bahrain until the Al-Khalifa regime substantially improves its human rights record. This money should be used to improve human rights and not to reward human rights abusers.

***Edward C. Corrigan** holds a B.A. in History and a Master's Degree in Political Science from the University of Western Ontario. He also has a Law Degree from the University of Windsor and was called to the Bar of the Law Society of Upper Canada in 1992. His academic area of expertise is the Middle East and he has published many articles in academic publications including Middle East Policy, Middle East International, Outlook and Z Magazine.*

*Interview by: Lachin Rezaian*