



Bahrain ? monarchy and imperialist interests under threat

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The island monarchy of Bahrain has seen its first mass protests emerging against the regime, reports Rachel Brooks

Inspired by the events in Tunisia and Egypt, thousands have come out in protest in the Gulf coastal state of Bahrain. Bahrain is the poorest of the states along the gulf coast and is ruled by an unconstitutional monarchy. The majority of protesters are demanding a constitution, not even an end to the monarchy. But this was too much for the Wahhabi King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa.

Protesters occupied pearl Square in the centre of the capital Manama on Tuesday 15 February. Pearl Square was attacked by riot police at 3am on 17 February, and violently cleared out, hundreds were injured and four were killed. Now the capital is under siege by police and the army, tanks on every street corner, armed police checking peoples identity papers. But as Abdul Wahab Hussain, an opposition leader made clear this week ?This is just the beginning?.

As people were being shot and tear gassed by police Bahrain?s main TV channel showed cookery programmes. Meanwhile at the airport journalists were refused entry into the country for ?security concerns?. King Khalifa does not want the world to see the massacre he wants to carry out.

Any movement and unrest in Bahrain is of huge consequence to the region, but also to the U.S.; it is an exceptionally oil rich island, and one of the first countries in the region to discover these resources. On top of this it is a huge finance and banking centre for the region, with a fairly prosperous economy and a very big expatriate community. Crucially though, it is the base for the US Fifth Naval fleet, and it is very clear that any uprising in this country will be watched very carefully by the U.S. Despite a fairly affluent economy, the majority of Bahrainis live in poverty and there is great resentment about the US Naval base.

The king, of Bahrain, Khalifah, is the supreme authority. In 2002 the country did elect a parliament with an independent judiciary, however it is toothless and all real power. Sectarian tensions mark political life in Bahrain. The king and his family are from the Sunni minority, however the country has a Shia majority. These tensions will, undoubtedly, have some roll to play in the current unrest, the King will stoke up anti-Shia feeling and use sectarian divisions to try and weaken the movement.

The demonstrators have released a list of demands, inspired by Tunisia and Egypt, as well as countless other protests taking place in the middle-east:

- ? Political prisoners to be released
- ? More jobs and house
- ? The creation of a more representative and empowered parliament
- ? A new constitution written by the people
- ? A new cabinet that does not include Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa Bin Salman Al Khalifa, who has been in office for 40 years

These demands clearly point to the nature of the movement, which has a pro democratic programme. On the one hand there is clearly a democratic question, in a country with very little representation of the majority population. It is perhaps the case that the Wafaq bloc is fighting for more political power in the parliament. On the other hand, there is clearly a lack of jobs and housing, with many young Bahrainis living in poverty. The people of Bahrain can overthrow the monarchy and institute more democratic reforms, but these will only be temporary unless they can strike at the heart of the nexus of power relations that focus on their island state ? the domination of imperialism and the quisling regime in the royal palace. This requires turning the political revolution into a social revolution as part of the wider revolutionary movement across the region.

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