

FRESH ALLEGATIONS OF TORTURE IN BAHRAIN

On a day when President Obama is at least making the admirable move of visiting the West Bank and speaking favorably for Palestinian statehood after his visit to Israel (to lend legitimacy to Netanyahu's continued desire to attack Iran?), it is easy to overlook a report in the Wall Street Journal in which we see fresh allegations of torture continuing in Bahrain.

Recall that in the aftermath of Bahrain's brutal crackdown on its citizens trying to join in the Arab Spring movement in early 2011, one of Bahrain's "reforms" was to hire notorious police thug John Timoney to run its police force and to "implement" the findings of an independent commission that had been brought in to investigate torture and other abuses by the government. Just a few months after taking charge, Timoney took the repressive step of banning all protests while jailing a number of prominent protest figures. A couple of days later, there were mysterious bomb blasts that might well have been the work of Timoney's known practice of infiltration since they were not directed at government targets as one might expect if they were the work of a developing resistance movement. US actions in response to abuses on the part of Bahrain's government has been especially lame since the US is so attached to its base for the Fifth Fleet in Bahrain and "security" for the flow of oil from the region.

The new allegations of torture include torture of suspects arrested for those November 2012 bombings:

Five detainees arrested in Bahrain last year said they were tortured in custody, according to family members, lawyers and an ex-prisoner, accusations that a member of an official inquiry panel said should be formally investigated.

Bahrain security forces used methods including beatings, electrocution and suspension on ropes to force confessions from the detainees, who were accused of involvement in bombings in the capital, Manama, the people alleged to The Wall Street Journal. The Bahrain government said the torture allegations were false.

The claims suggest the Bahrain government has failed to implement some of the changes recommended by the 2011 Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, according to Sir Nigel Rodley, a human-rights lawyer who took part in the commission.

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One detainee, Talib Ali Mohammed, 37 years old, was arrested in November on suspicion of involvement in coordinated bombings in Manama that month that killed two expatriate workers.

Over 16 days of interrogation in the Central Intelligence Department building in the Adliya district of Manama, Mr. Talib was beaten repeatedly and tortured, according to his wife, Fatima Ebrahim, and his lawyer, Sayed Hashin Saleh, who have seen Mr. Talib in prison and spoken with him by phone. Mr. Talib eventually confessed to charges including possessing explosive material and forming a group with the intention of harming others.

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Ahmed Abdullah, a 24-year-old gymnasium worker, was arrested in November and accused by authorities of involvement in the bombings. According to his brother Ibrahim, who has visited him in prison and spoken to him by phone, Mr. Abdullah was blindfolded for nearly 20 days in the CID building in Adliya, where he was beaten repeatedly, and forced to stand

for long periods until he signed a confession.

There is now new leadership at the Department of State. Will we see a stronger condemnation of torture by the Bahrain government and support for Rodley's call for a new commission of inquiry over the new torture accusations, or will we get the same weak platitudes we saw from Foggy Bottom last year?

Bahrain continues to profess its innocence. In one of the most craven, idiotic defenses by a government ever, the Journal carried this denial:

Minister of State for Information Affairs Samira Ibrahim Bin Rajab dismissed the allegations. "This is not our culture, not our attitude or our behavior," she said. "We are very civilized, educated people."

Civilized, educated people never torture. They rely on enhance interrogation techniques that are perfectly legal. Just ask John Yoo. He'll confirm that in an instant and have a follow-up memo for you tomorrow that retroactively authorizes any actions you need approved.