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## Attack of the Five Monarchies

By Rannie Amiri

September 30, 2014

It is the irony of ironies. A cadre of repressive monarchies is chosen to liberate the captive peoples of Iraq and Syria from the tyranny of ISIS.

Combating a group known for its violent sectarianism, the five Arab allies ordered by the United States to participate in the bombing campaign against ISIS are themselves the region's worst sectarian agitators. Jordan, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates are now at the vanguard of efforts to dismantle an organization that is essentially of their own creation.

After the downfall of Saddam Hussein, it was King Abdullah II of Jordan who raised the sectarian specter, warning of the emergence of a "Shiite crescent" in the Middle East, sending panic throughout the monarchies of the Gulf and beyond. It was a rallying cry; a call to arms which heralded operations to destabilize Iraq, and in less than ten years time, Syria.

Bahrain has been a true standout in its brutal crackdown against pro-democracy activists and reformers who hope to see the unchecked powers of the al-Khalifa royal family restrained. For its part, the regime has hidden nothing. Their brazen oppression is very much out in the open for its Western allies to witness: torture, show trials, arbitrary detentions, revocation of citizenship, deportations and media blackouts. All are daily occurrences and come in the backdrop of longstanding socioeconomic and political disenfranchisement. Two of the country's most prominent human rights defenders are Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, the (imprisoned) co-founder of

the Bahrain Center for Human Rights and Nabeel Rajab, its current president. Rajab succinctly contextualizes Bahrain's political crisis:

*"The ruling family is Sunni. The ruling family is repressive. It's true that the majority of protesters are Shia, because the majority of the population is Shia, but we are not against the family's religion – we are against their policies, attitude and behavior. The ruling family tries to present it as a Shia-Sunni issue, but we are not against the Sunni people."*

*"I come from a mixed family and our revolt is against the ruling family that wants to keep all the power. We are struggling to share this power. Seventy percent of our government is from one family, we have had the same prime minister for more than 40 years. This system can't continue. It is time for democracy, justice and human rights. We are a civilized, educated nation. But unfortunately we happen to be ruled by a tribe."*

Saudi Arabia and Qatar must be mentioned in tandem. The two rival families – al-Saud and al-Thani respectively – have long vied for power and influence in the Middle East. Initially it was through the dueling television stations Al Arabiya and Al-Jazeera. It has since become far more sinister: by funding competing, armed extremist groups. Qatar has effectively abandoned the Muslim Brotherhood as its proxy of choice, opting instead for the de facto al-Qaeda stand-in, *Jabhat al-Nusra* or the Nusra Front, one of the main "opposition" factions operating in Syria. Its main competitor of course is ISIS, the brainchild of Saudi Arabia. Patrick Cockburn, writing in *The Independent*, nicely details how Saudi Arabia was complicit in helping ISIS take over northern Iraq. Other journalists have drawn similar conclusions.

ISIS is a *takfiri* group branding anyone not conforming to their regressive ideology as worthy of execution, particularly Shia Muslims, Alawites, Christians and Yazidis. Members of ISIS' own (purported) sect – Sunni Muslims – are given a reprieve of sorts but have equally suffered under their rule. In Saudi Arabia, the official *Wahabi* creed is only one step removed from the *takfiri* worldview. It comes as no surprise to learn that its Shia citizens are the victims of pervasive, institutionalized discrimination. Some clerics in the Kingdom have even gone so far as to brand them non-Muslims (which opens up a whole set of permissive practices), a view likewise held by ISIS.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has worked in concert with Saudi Arabia in opposing certain political parties, namely the Muslim Brotherhood. Along with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, the UAE was the only other country to officially recognize Taliban rule in Afghanistan. Notorious for cracking down on all forms of dissent, the UAE also has a habit of deporting Lebanese Shia expatriates from the country, presuming a connection to Hezbollah based on sect alone.

"America is proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with these nations on behalf of our common security," Obama said. "The strength of this coalition makes it clear to the world that this isn't America's fight alone. Above all, the people and governments of the Middle East are rejecting ISIL ..."

Obama naively equates the Arab people with their governments. The people of the Middle East reject not only ISIS, but these five monarchies and all their machinations and schemes as well.

Including them in any coalition to fight the very sectarian, destructive monster they directly or indirectly helped create is yet another reason why the military campaign against ISIS is destined for failure.