Donald Trump’s administration has, through its diplomacy, achieved a “resounding success” in the Persian Gulf. Bahrain, a small emirate with a tiny population which US diplomats could scarcely even find on the map, even after repeated attempts, has, under US pressure, declared that it will participate in the policy of “free passage of vessels”, on terms dictated by the US.

Bahrain, where the United States Fifth Fleet (responsible for the Middle East region) is based, has joined the USA’s naval coalition to ensure the safety of commercial maritime passage in the Persian Gulf. This development was announced following a meeting between the King of Bahrain, Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr, the new head of the United States Central Command.

As yet, none of the Persian Gulf nations have shown much enthusiasm for helping the US to take control of the situation in the Gulf. It is true that they are actively trying to push the US into a conflict with Iran, and are doing all they can to incite Donald Trump by playing on his ambition to be No 1 global hegemon. Especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE, whose leaders are well aware that if the current illegal sanctions against Iran are withdrawn then Teheran will be able to assume de facto leadership of the region and the Sunni states will have to kowtow to the tune of the Shiites. In order to protect their delusional monopoly over power in the region the Saudi Sunnis have gone so far as to enter into a partnership with Israel, a country they describe themselves as the most hated enemy of all the Arabs.

However things are rather different in Bahrain, a country whose government, which is entirely drawn from the Sunni minority, has no wish to share power with the Shiites, who make up 80% of the population and whose sympathies, quite naturally, are with Iran. It was the UAE’s and Saudi Arabia’s security forces who crushed Bahrain’s “Pearl Revolution” and cemented the domination of the Sunnis over the Shiites for many years to come. Bahrain is also home to the USA’s largest foreign naval base, one of the four US bases in the monarchy and the surrounding islands, which include the main base in Manama, Bahrain’s capital, and the supply base in Al-Muharraq. The USA’s Nimitz-class aircraft carriers, including USS Abraham Lincoln and USS George Washington, can often be seen in these bases. These bases are key points for stationing and supplying the US Navy, and are among the first places to respond to any critical situation.

Another significant military facility is the US Isa Air Base, which is 238 km from the Iranian coast. This aerodrome, with two runways, each 3.8 kilometers long, is home to C-17 military transport aircraft, F-16 fighter jets and P-3 Orion marine surveillance aircraft. And there are also FA-18 bombers and EA-6B Prowler electronic-warfare aircraft, based on aircraft carriers.

In view of the great importance of the Persian Gulf and the Bahrain’s strategically convenient location, the UK Ministry of Defence has opened its first new naval base for 80 years in Manama. According to announcement by the Ministry of Defence, the base is located in Mina Salman, and is home to more than 300 British naval staff and civilian personnel, and can accommodate up to 550 staff for short periods. According to the announcement, the new British naval base “will provide a key strategic base east of Suez for Britain, its allies and coalition partners.”

Bahrain has thus, whether it likes it or not, turned into a satellite, forced to orbit around the US-UK-Saudi Arabia axis, and with no power to take any steps without their approval. There are two fairly important reasons for this.
Firstly, there are payments for Bahrain’s services in hosting US and British bases and the long-term financial support from Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, which make up a significant part of its budget - Bahrain being a fairly poor country by Arab standards.

Another significant factor is the coalition’s unconditional support of Bahrain’s King and his family, despite the popular protests which have continued unabated since 2011’s ill-fated “Pearl Revolution”. Since February 2011 the Bahrainis have regularly held peaceful demonstrations calling for the abdication of the Al-Khalifa family and the creation of a just political system which represents all Bahrainis. They also complain of widespread discrimination against the Shiite majority in the country. Manama has reacted against the demonstrations harshly - the authorities have detained human rights campaigners, dissolved the main opposition parties and deprived pro-democracy activists of citizenship and deported many of them, thus making them stateless.

The February 14 Youth Coalition, a major opposition group, issued a declaration in which it described the US and UK governments as “complicit in the Manama regime’s crimes against political prisoners of the Persian Gulf country.” The declaration also stated that more than 600 political prisoners are on unlimited hunger strike in protest against harsh treatment in Bahrain’s infamous Jaw prison, and that the group is confident that they will be victorious in their struggle against the Al-Khalifa regime.

The situation in which so-called democratic states are allied with such reactionary and repressive regimes is rather paradoxical, to say the least. In this case it is hard not to be reminded of the saying, "tell me who your friends are and I will tell you who you are." For the best friends of USA and Britain include Kings (Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Jordan), Emirs (Qatar, Kuwait), Sheikhs (UAE) and a Sultan (Oman). And so what are we to make of the leaders of those Western nations who continually vaunt their adherence to democracy? What kind of democratic ideal do they aspire to, and what does their democracy look like in practice?

In any event, Bahrain’s King is playing a dangerous game, as it is clear that, in the event of a military conflict, the US and UK bases, which occupy a significant area of the country, will be right in the firing line.

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