



## US Concerned Over Unrest in Bahrain

Scott Stearns  
October 17, 2013

The United States is increasingly concerned about unrest in Bahrain ahead of the trial of a leading opposition activist later this month. There has been little progress in a national dialogue that was agreed to following violent demonstrations in 2011. Considering Bahrain is home to the U.S. Fifth Fleet, it's a worrisome issue for Washington.

Violence following the funeral of a Bahraini opposition activist is the latest setback to a national dialogue that was to have settled differences between the government and its opponents.

"We are disappointed by recent events that have happened on the ground and eroded the prospects of dialogue in Bahrain," said U.S. State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki.

The Obama administration is aware of the detention and death of 31-year-old dissident Yousif Ali al-Nashmi, Psaki said. He was arrested in August on charges of taking part in illegal protests, although the Bahrain Center for Human Rights disputes that.

He died several days after his release this month following what human rights groups say was abuse in detention.

Last month, President Obama compared sectarian tensions in Bahrain to the violence in Iraq and Syria.

Bahrain is a majority Shi'ite country but is ruled by a Sunni royal family.

However, the government of King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa claims there is no comparing Bahrain with Syria and Iraq, where sectarian tensions have fueled violence.

A foreign ministry statement said "terrorist extremist groups" are targeting security forces and that Bahrain is responding "within the rule of law."

The opposition is demanding more jobs, more democracy, and the release of all political prisoners.

Doug Bandow of the Cato Institute feels Washington has missed an opportunity with Bahrain's

Shi'ites, who make up 70 percent of the population but are not proportionately represented in politics.

"The U.S. has done very little on behalf of Shia in Bahrain, where the majority are struggling for some greater say in their government," said Bandow.

Psaki said the Obama administration is urging Bahrain's government to uphold freedoms of assembly and expression and for all parties to reaffirm their commitment to nonviolence.

"There's more that all parties can do to move things forward. So I don't know if there's a specific obstacle as much as there's more that needs to be done," said Psaki.

Former U.S. Ambassador Adam Ereli claims Washington's "middle-ground" is not working.

"Nobody knows what the U.S. position is. In Bahrain they say, 'Look, we support a democratic process. Don't use violence.' But we don't condemn the opposition. We don't declare support for the regime. Nobody knows what side we're on," explained Ereli.

Opposition groups suspended their participation in the national dialogue over last month's detention of activist Khalil Marzouq, who is charged with using his leadership position in a legal political organization to incite violence. Amnesty International calls him a prisoner of conscience. His trial is set to begin October 24.