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The counter-revolution club

By Pepe Escobar

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They are a shish kebab of hereditary monarchies, emirates and outright theocracies. Most sit on oceans of oil (45% of the world's reserves). They are addicted to the West's glitter and glamour - from London to Monte Carlo, from the delicacies of Paris to the weaponized delicacies of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). They abhor democracy like they abhor poverty. Some would be glad to topple their own people - as indeed they do. And they view Shi'ite Iran as worse than the anti-Christ.

Welcome to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), formed in 1981 by top dog Saudi Arabia plus the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman. A more appropriate denomination would be Gulf Counter-Revolutionary Council - or club; a Gulf club to end all golf clubs. As far as the GCC is concerned, the great 2011 Arab revolt will triumph over their (wealthy) dead bodies.

How can they be so sure? Republican dynasties as in Tunisia or Egypt may be toppled; Libya may be bombed to the Stone Age; Syria may be threatened. But nothing will happen to the GCC because the enlightened West - not Allah - is their supreme guardian.

New members welcome

It's instructive to note that those 3,000-plus bombing raids on Libya since NATO took over the war on March 31 were conducted mostly by monarchies (Britain, Denmark, the Netherlands,

Norway, Qatar and the UAE), apart from republican France, and before that, via Africom, the United States.

Only a few hours before United States President Barack Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron were enjoying a special relationship barbecue this week, NATO was turning 19 Libyan civilians into, well, barbecue, and slightly roasting at least 130 others. The GCC merrily applauded.

The European Union (EU) and the GCC have issued a joint declaration forcing Colonel Muammar Gaddafi to go, not before handing over power to the Libyan Transitional National Council - which happens to be financed and armed exactly by NATO and the GCC.

Now the GCC has declared it would love the idea of Jordan joining the club - and the same applies to Morocco. As for Yemen - which has yearned to be a member since 1999 - forget it; it's not a monarchy, and "unstable" to boot, with all those unruly people protesting. The best the GCC can do is to allegedly "mediate" into what is in effect regime change - fully supported by the US and the EU.

Apart from tiny Oman, whose Sultan Qabus follows the Ibadī school, all GCC members are hardcore Sunnis. There are plenty of Jordanian "advisers" among the Bahraini/Saudi repression machine.

Jordan and Morocco may get to become GCC members not only because they're monarchies - but most of all because they hate Iran like the plague (even though they are not exactly located in the Persian Gulf.)

Jordan's King Playstation, sorry, Abdullah II, invented the murky concept of the "Shi'ite crescent" way back in 2004, a conspiracy according to which Shi'ites from Iran and Iraq to Lebanon and Syria would violently take over the Middle East. Morocco's King Muhammad VI for his part cut off diplomatic relations with Tehran in 2009.

The GCC's top moment of counter-revolutionary glory, so far, happened less than two days after US Defense Secretary Robert Gates left Bahrain - when Saudi Arabia, with a minor contribution from the UAE, invaded Bahrain in support of their cousins, the Sunni al-Khalifa dynasty, and against the overwhelming majority of the peaceful, protesting Bahraini population. The GCC's secretary general, Abdullatif al-Zayani, happens to be an al-Khalifa-aligned Bahraini.

There were no US, United Nations or EU sanctions, much less a NATO bombing spree to "celebrate" this invasion. Instead, earlier this week, EU foreign ministers slapped even more sanctions against Belarus, Iran, Libya and Syria. Not by accident all of them have been Washington targets for regime change, since the time of the neo-conservatives.

Let us play in your courtyard

Neo-colonial NATO and monarchic/theocratic GCC is a match made in weapons contractor heaven. The GCC will be incorporated into the global US missile shield system. Soon, there'll be

that juicy \$60 billion weapons deal with Saudi Arabia - the largest in American history.

Western idolatry practitioners that they are, GCC members also wanna have fun and be part of the real post-modern action - neo-colonial war. After all, NATO itself can be interpreted as a professional mercenary neo-colonial army, ready to intervene anywhere from Central Asia to Northern Africa.

Take Qatar. Qatar was the first country to recognize that dodgy bunch, the Libyan "rebels"; the first GCC member to supply NATO with French Mirage fighter jets and American C-17 Globemasters; it set up satellite Ahrar TV for the Transitional Council; showered them with MILAN missile launchers; and most of all immediately started to "supervise" oil exports from Cyrenaica.

The reward was inevitable; on April 14, Obama hosted the emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, at the White House, and lavishly praised him for his "leadership" in promoting "democracy in the Middle East" - a reference to Qatar's role in Libya.

As for Salman al-Khalifa, the Crown Prince of Bahrain, on May 19 he glowingly posed for a photo-op on the steps of 10 Downing Street in London with Prime Minister Cameron, proving that slaughtering civilian, unarmed protesters and giving a green light for the House of Saud to invade his country was definitely good for business.

But no one beats the UAE in the deadly toy realm. President Nicolas Sarkozy opened France's first military base in the Middle East in Abu Dhabi. The UAE has sent fighter jets to NATO in Libya. They are a "troop-contributing nation" for NATO in Afghanistan. And they will be the first GCC and Arab nation to send an ambassador to NATO headquarters in Brussels.

Along with Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain, the UAE is a member of one of NATO's myriad "partnerships" - the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative military partnership. Translation: NATO encroaching on the Persian Gulf, positioning itself to raise any amount of hell against Iran.

And then there's Zayed Military City; a secluded training camp in the desert for a secret army of mercenaries, to be deployed not only in the UAE but throughout the Middle East and Northern Africa.

Off with their heads!

Milking the GCC's burning desire to outsource mercenaries; that's the latest high-value-added scam of former Navy SEALs and former Blackwater supremo Erik Prince (in 2009 Blackwater was rebranded Xe Services.)

It was in Abu Dhabi that Prince - through a joint venture called Reflex Responses - signed a first contract of \$529 million on July 13, 2010, to deliver his services to "progressive" Sheik Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan. The idea was Zayed's.

The New York Times may have had its kicks depicting, in a May 14 story, Colombians entering

the UAE posing as construction workers, with special visas stamped by the UAE's military intelligence branch, so they could clear customs and immigration with no questions asked; yes, Prince wants battalions of Colombian and Central American mercenaries; he won't recruit Muslims to kill their own cousins and be faced with malfunctioning units.

At least the paper pointed that Prince "is hoping to build an empire in the desert, far from the trial lawyers, congressional investigators and Justice Department officials" - without asking any hard questions about it.

The mercenary army's agenda contains everything one needs to know; they will be involved in special ops inside and outside the UAE; "urban combat"; the "securing of nuclear and radioactive materials"; "humanitarian missions" (?); the defense of oil pipelines and sleek glass towers from "terrorist attacks"; and most significant of all, "crowd-control operations", where the crowd "is not armed with firearms but does pose a risk using improvised weapons [clubs and stones]".

There it is, spelled out; internal repression all across the Persian Gulf, as against the sprawling labor camps housing tens of thousands of South Asian workers; or in case citizens of the UAE get the Bahrain pro-democracy fever. The excuse for all these ops could not be less original: the Iranian bogeyman, or "aggression".

Prince had always wanted Blackwater to be a mercenary army deployable anywhere in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. He even wanted the US Central Intelligence Agency to use it for global special ops - before the CIA decided to laser on drones as a more cost-effective method. Now Prince has a wealthy Sheikh - a Pentagon fan who's in favor of bombing Iran - to bankroll his "vision".

The first battalion boasts 580 mercenaries. Zayed's men have promised that if they prove themselves in a "real-world mission", the Emirate will pay Prince for a whole brigade of several thousand men, to the tune of billions of dollars. Prince could then move to his dream of a desert mercenary training complex modeled after Blackwater's compound in Moyock, North Carolina.

So expect another "House of Saud does Bahrain" scenario. Like the mercenary army beating to death Pakistanis, Nepalis, Bangladeshis and Filipinos who want better working conditions in the UAE.

Or expect covert special ops in Egypt and Tunisia to ensure their next governments align themselves with the US and the EU. Or expect boots on the ground in Libya to "provide humanitarian aid to civilians" (oops, that was two months ago; even Obama now says it's all about regime change).

Still, all those Libyan "oil facilities" must be in the safe hands of US and EU multinationals (and not Russian, Indian and Chinese). Still, Gaddafi's inner circle must be "neutralized". And still Libya must be kept subdued, according to the age-old imperial tenets of divide and rule.

So when the goin' gets tough, who you're gonna call? Definitely Xe Services' "innovative

solutions", brought to you by Sheikh Zayed. No wonder the GCC club is the talk of the (counter-revolutionary) town.