

Bahrain minister briefly hacked after Qatar cyber attack

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Bahraini Foreign Minister Sheikh Khaled bin Ahmed al-Khalifa addresses a press conference in Kuwait City on April 16, 2017

Hackers temporarily took over the Twitter account of the Bahraini foreign minister on Saturday, just 10 days after a cyber attack on the official news agency of neighbouring Qatar.

The hack, which purported to be carried out in the name of a fringe

militant group, came after Bahraini authorities dissolved the kingdom's last major opposition movement and after police shot dead five protesters while dispersing a long-running sit-in.

Foreign Minister Khaled bin Ahmad al-Khalifa, a member of the royal family, tweeted he had recovered his account four hours after images of bloodied bodies, demolished mosques and what appeared to be a child's illustration of war rolled down his official Twitter page.

The pictures were captioned: "What the petrodollar media doesn't show you," a reference to the satellite television channels funded by neighbouring Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

The foreign ministry confirmed the account had been recovered Saturday and blamed the attack on a "terrorist group", vowing to "hold accountable the individuals behind this despicable act".

Bahrain has been gripped by persistent unrest since 2011 when its Sunni rulers crushed protests led by its Shiite majority demanding a constitutional monarchy and an elected prime minister.

The authorities have jailed several opposition leaders on charges of inciting violence but human rights groups say the mainstream opposition has remained peaceful.

Saturday's hackers tagged their posts with the name and logo of Saraya al-Mukhtar, a Shiite group with a strong online presence, and made open threats against the ruling Al-Khalifa family.

The hackers also spoke out against the treatment of Shiites in neighbouring Saudi Arabia and in Yemen, where a Saudi-led coalition including Bahrain is fighting Shiite rebels who control the capital Sanaa.

"We take an oath before you—we demand the execution of King Hamad," one tweet said.

"We will soon reap the skulls of you who danced on the blood of our men in Bahrain, Qatif and Yemen," another tweet said.

The hackers retweeted a number of posts by Numur al-Hurriya (Tigers of Freedom), which purports to be an opposition group in the mainly Shiite Qatif district of eastern Saudi Arabia.

Two men were blown up in Qatif on Friday by what the Saudi authorities said was munitions they were transporting in their vehicle.

Sunni-dominated Saudi Arabia has seen repeated disturbances among its Shiite minority, most of whom live in the east, close to the causeway linking it with Bahrain.

Neighbouring Qatar is still investigating the May 24 hack of its official news agency website and Twitter account in which damaging comments about a raft of sensitive regional issues were falsely attributed to its ruler.

The hackers also posted a fake report that Qatar had severed relations with several neighbouring countries.

FBI experts are helping with the investigation, sources close to the case told AFP on Friday.

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