



Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain

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January 20, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing to extend my most sincere congratulations to you as you assume the office of President. I encourage you from your very first day in office to review and revise US policy on one of the most pressing and intertwined human right and national security challenges facing the United States, the Kingdom of Bahrain.

I had to leave my home country of Bahrain over twenty years ago, fleeing an oppressive government where freedom of expression and peaceful dissent did not have a place. While I was able to enjoy all the freedoms and benefits of democracy that America offers, my people in Bahrain are still suffering under a brutal dictatorship.

The situation in Bahrain represents a serious and ongoing violation of human rights that should be intolerable to the United States under any circumstances. However, the political instability created within Bahrain by the systematic, violent, and unceasing repression of its people is also a direct threat to US security interests in the Persian Gulf Region and globally. Improvements in human rights in Bahrain are directly linked to US security interests and should be pursued as a priority by the Biden Administration, including through multilateral institutions.

The human rights violations perpetrated by the Government of Bahrain are undisputed. The US State Department reports an ongoing litany of abuses by the Government of Bahrain, including allegations of torture, arbitrary detention, political prisoners, and restrictions on freedom of expression and political participation. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and other human rights groups have identified thousands of individuals who have been arrested, imprisoned, executed, fined, or otherwise repressed by the Government of Bahrain. Hundreds of Bahrainis have had their citizenship revoked and thousands of political prisoners languish in Bahraini prisons. Men, women, the elderly, and children as young as 12-years-old have been targeted by the government of Bahrain.

However, current US policy to Bahrain largely turns a blind eye to repression of human rights and deep-seeded social instability in Bahrain due to the mutual benefits the two countries enjoy based on the location of the US Fifth Fleet in Bahrain. These benefits are also indisputable, but maintaining a one-dimensional relationship with Bahrain builds untenable security risks into the relationship for the US. These risks can be substantially reduced or eliminated by if Bahrain begins a path that includes an end to political repression, including release of all political prisoners, accountability for human rights violators,

and a path to free and fair elections. If Bahrain continues its human rights violations, the US should consider relocating the Fifth Fleet to a more suitable location.

For the security of both countries, the US should immediately begin to develop policies and programs focused on holding officials of the Government of Bahrain accountable for their systematic human rights violations against the people of Bahrain, to meeting its commitments to international human rights standards, and repairing the damage caused by a decade of brutal repression. This path will strengthen the relationship and security interests of the two countries and enhance Bahrain's status as a sustainable, dependable, and desirable ally and partner of the US. It will also visibly reinforce the American commitment to universal human rights at a time when this is needed around the globe.

I am confident that through development of a more mature, holistic US policy toward Bahrain, the US will be able to uphold its commitment to human rights while not only maintaining, but enhancing, its national security interests in the Persian Gulf Region, and globally. I ask that you conduct a thorough review of US policy and develop and implement a set of policies and programs toward Bahrain targeted at better achieving sustainable US interests in both human rights and security. At a minimum, this plan should include:

- Clear and consistent messaging from all levels of the U.S. Government encouraging the Government of Bahrain to adhere to its human rights commitments and enact meaningful reforms including the release of all political prisoners, accountability for torture and other serious human rights crimes, and a timetable for free and fair elections.
- A high-level team from the US State Department visiting Bahrain to evaluate the human rights situation, meet with political prisoners and opposition leaders like Mr. Hasan Mushaima, the leader of the political opposition in Bahrain, make recommendations for the Government of Bahrain to come into compliance with international standards of human rights, and recommend policies and mechanisms for the US to encourage human rights improvements in Bahrain.
- A clear policy and timeline to transition the current political system of dictatorship in Bahrain to a representative democracy.
- A contingency plan for relocating the US Fifth Fleet if the stability of the Bahraini regime continues to erode.
- A review of Bahrain participation in International Military Education and Training (IMET) program which has provided at least \$2.4 million in assistance for nearly 900 Bahraini officers since Fiscal Year 2014 while the Bahraini military has been implicated in human rights abuses against its own people.
- A review of more than \$20 million in Foreign Military Financing and more than \$28 million in DoD military grant assistance since Fiscal Year 2014 to Bahrain while the Bahraini military had been implicated in human rights abuses against its own people.
- A Global Magnitsky Act investigation into Bahrain to hold accountable Bahraini government officials implicated in political repression and other rights violations, including the torture and arbitrary detention of political leaders and human rights defenders.
- Renewed prohibition of U.S. arms sales to Bahrain.
- Full compliance with the intent of the "Leahy Law" to avoid U.S. complicity with human rights violations including a thorough review to 1) determine if Bahraini security force units are ineligible for transfers and 2) verify that U.S.-origin weapons are not enabling human rights abuses in Bahrain.

- Prioritize human rights and democracy promotion funding for Bahrain, including through the Democracy Fund and the Middle East Partnership Initiative.
- Publicly call for Bahrain to fully cooperate with all United Nations human rights procedures and commitments including ongoing access for the Special Rapporteur on Torture and other Cruel, Unusual, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment to visit Bahrain and conduct a full investigation into practices in the country that may concern his mandate and establishment of a permanent country mission to Bahrain by the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, including a full reporting and capacity-building mandate.

Thank you for your commitment to human rights, Mr. President. I look forward to your immediate and sustained actions to improve the human rights situation for the people of Bahrain.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Husain Abdulla', with a horizontal line underneath.

Husain Abdulla
Executive Director

Cc
Secretary of Defense-designee Lloyd Austin
Secretary of State-designee Antony Blinken
Jake Sullivan, National Security Advisor