

RON WYDEN  
OREGON

CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEE ON  
FINANCE

221 DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510  
(202) 224-5244

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3703

**COMMITTEES:**  
COMMITTEE ON FINANCE  
COMMITTEE ON BUDGET  
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY & NATURAL RESOURCES  
SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE  
JOINT COMMITTEE ON TAXATION

June 25, 2015

The Honorable John Kerry  
Secretary of State  
United States Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

I write to express my strong concerns about reports that you intend to reconsider or reverse the administration's four-year ban on selling or transferring certain weapons to the government of Bahrain.

Last week, a Bloomberg View article titled "U.S. Moves to Lift Bahrain Arms Ban" reported that you made a commitment in early May to Bahrain's Foreign Minister to work toward reversing current U.S. policy with respect to arms sales to that country. I was particularly surprised to read the article because State Department officials assured my staff two weeks ago that no such commitment had been made to the Bahrain government.

To be clear, I am not surprised that Bahrain would like more access to U.S. weapons, and I am aware that they have been making their case to the relevant congressional committees. Their case seems to rest on two arguments: 1) they have made all the necessary reforms and 2) they should be rewarded for helping the U.S. in the fight against the Islamic State or ISIL.

To the first argument, please see the State Department's own annual Human Rights Report, which details the ongoing "arrest and detention of protesters on vague charges, in some cases leading to their torture in detention" as well as the "arbitrary deprivation of life" and the "lack of consistent accountability for security officers accused of committing human rights violations." In 2013—two years after the final Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) report—the State Department concluded that Bahrain had fully implemented only 5 of the 26 BICI recommendations. Or as the Washington Post Editorial Board wrote last Friday, "the regime has occasionally promised reforms or dialogue with the opposition but invariably has failed to follow through." My view on the second argument is that giving Bahrain extra credit for helping fight ISIL is like giving somebody credit for helping put out a fire in their own back yard.

I do not mean to discount Bahrain's status as a major non-NATO ally or the U.S.-Bahrain security partnership. Indeed, it is *because* I believe in holding U.S. partners and allies to a higher standard that I have been so critical of the Bahraini government's continued human rights violations. An April 2015 Amnesty International report found Bahrain authorities continue to arrest and imprison peaceful protesters. "Torture and other ill-treatment of detainees remain rife" the report concluded. As I write this letter, the government of Bahrain has just sentenced

911 NE 11TH AVENUE  
SUITE 630  
PORTLAND, OR 97232  
(503) 326-7525

405 EAST 8TH AVE  
SUITE 2020  
EUGENE, OR 97401  
(541) 431-0229

SAC ANNEX BUILDING  
105 FIR ST  
SUITE 201  
LA GRANDE, OR 97850  
(541) 962-7691

U.S. COURTHOUSE  
310 WEST 6TH ST  
ROOM 118  
MEDFORD, OR 97501  
(541) 858-5122

THE JAMISON BUILDING  
131 NW HAWTHORNE AVE  
SUITE 107  
BEND, OR 97701  
(541) 330-9142

707 13TH ST, SE  
SUITE 285  
SALEM, OR 97301  
(503) 589-4555

the main opposition leader to four years in prison and the once heralded National Dialogue remains on ice. One of the country's leading human rights defenders, Nabeel Rajab, sits in jail because of a tweet. These clearly are not the actions of a government that has reformed or is reforming. Nor are they the actions of a government to which we should be selling these arms.

In short, I would be profoundly disappointed if the Bloomberg View story were accurate and the State Department were, in fact, moving to reconsider the ban on arms sales to Bahrain. Until the government of Bahrain makes real and meaningful progress to end the human rights violations and stops repressing the peaceful opposition, I will use my seat in the Senate to oppose any attempts to lift the ban now in place since 2011.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator