



**House Foreign Affairs Committee  
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission**

**Briefing on Bahrain: 2018 Elections  
June 10, 2018 - 10:00 a.m. 2255 Rayburn House Office Building**

**Statement of Michael Payne  
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In May 2011, former President Barack Obama said that “mass arrests and brute force are at odds with the universal rights of Bahrain’s citizens, and such steps will not make legitimate calls for reform go away. The only way forward is for the government and opposition to engage in a dialogue, and you can’t have a real dialogue when parts of the peaceful opposition are in jail.”<sup>1</sup> Yet more than seven years later, the Government of Bahrain has not just jailed parts of the opposition – it’s dismantled it entirely. Ahead of the parliamentary elections set for this fall, Bahraini authorities have closed virtually all space for peaceful political dissent – and the United States (US) has rubberstamped repression with new arms sales.

While Bahrain is technically a constitutional monarchy, near-absolute political power is concentrated in the Al Khalifa ruling family, and its members hold almost all key posts. The parliament, known as the National Assembly, is deeply hamstrung and lacks the authority to serve as a check on the ruling family. All members of the upper house are appointed by the king, and the government has engaged in a host of electoral abuses – including gerrymandering, voter fraud, and the outright dissolution of political opposition groups – to ensure that the elected lower house is not representative.

In 2001, the population voted overwhelmingly to approve a democratic reform plan known as the National Action Charter.<sup>2</sup> Within a year, however, the king abrogated the agreement and unilaterally issued a new constitution that diverged from the Charter and consolidated the ruling family’s power.<sup>3</sup> The government gradually intensified or imposed new restrictions on free expression, assembly, association, press, and religion.<sup>4</sup> Formal political parties were banned, and their nominal counterparts – known as societies – were subjected to extensive constraints.<sup>5</sup>

## **Elimination of the Opposition**

On the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Action Charter in 2011, nearly half Bahrain’s citizen population took part in demonstrations calling on the government to meet its reform commitments and guarantee basic human rights.<sup>6</sup> Security forces violently suppressed the movement and the authorities launched severe reprisals

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<sup>1</sup> “Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa,” Office of the Press Secretary, White House, United States Government, 19 May 2011, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/19/remarks-president-middle-east-and-north-africa>

<sup>2</sup> Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, “Bahrain’s Uprising: Regional Dimensions and International Consequences,” *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, 2(1):14, 2013, pp. 1-12, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/sta.be>

<sup>3</sup> Ala’a Shehabi and Marc Owen Jones, Eds. *Bahrain’s Uprising: Resistance and Repression in the Gulf*, Zed Books, 2015, <https://www.zedbooks.net/shop/book/bahrains-uprising/>

<sup>4</sup> *INT CCPR CSS BHR 31378 E - Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee for Bahrain’s Review under the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights*, Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB), June 2018, [http://www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/INT\\_CCPR\\_CSS\\_BHR\\_31378\\_E.pdf](http://www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/INT_CCPR_CSS_BHR_31378_E.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> *Interfere, Restrict, Control: Restraints on Freedom of Association in Bahrain*, Human Rights Watch, 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/06/20/interfere-restrict-control/restraints-freedom-association-bahrain>; and *Crushing Civil Society*, ADHRB, June 2017, [http://www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017.6.5\\_crushing-civil-society\\_web.pdf](http://www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017.6.5_crushing-civil-society_web.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> “Bahrain Uprisings and Reforms: An Overview with Policy Recommendations,” ADHRB, 2017, <http://www.adhrb.org/our-work/bahrain-uprisings-and-reforms-an-overview-with-policy-recommendations/>

against Bahrain's chief opposition societies: Wa'ad, Al-Wefaq, and Amal. During the initial crackdown and its aftermath, the government temporarily closed Wa'ad and imprisoned its secretary-general, Ebrahim Sharif; arrested and tortured Al-Wefaq members of parliament like Matar Matar; and arbitrarily disbanded Amal, detaining hundreds of members and incarcerating its leader, Mohammed Ali Al-Mahfood.<sup>7</sup> Some political figures also faced attacks by pro-government gangs, and Wa'ad's headquarters was set on fire. The government took even harsher steps against the unregistered opposition groups, Haq and Al-Wafa, sentencing leaders like Hassan Mushaima, Dr. Abduljalil al-Singace, and Abdulwahab Hussain to life in prison on trumped up charges. Bahrain's crown prince launched a National Dialogue process with the opposition, but harassment continued, with other Al-Wefaq leaders like Khalil al-Marzooq arrested for criticizing the government in 2013.<sup>8</sup>

As the National Dialogue collapsed in 2014, the government took further steps to punish and dismantle the opposition. During the run-up to that year's elections, the Ministry of Justice requested that the courts temporarily suspend Al-Wefaq and Wa'ad; both societies ultimately boycotted the elections, citing widespread government interference.<sup>9</sup> Earlier, in September 2014, security forces detained and tortured Khalil al-Halwachi, a scholar and activist, over his former membership in Amal, ultimately sentencing him to 10 years in prison.<sup>10</sup> In December 2014, authorities arrested Al-Wefaq's leader Sheikh Ali Salman on charges related solely to his political speeches, issuing him a four-year prison term.<sup>11</sup> In 2015, the government released and then immediately rearrested Wa'ad's Ebrahim Sharif – earning Bahrain the resumption of US arms sales but leaving Sharif with another year in prison.<sup>12</sup> After Al-Wefaq's Khalil al-Marzooq discussed Bahrain's political crisis on a new television channel that same year, the authorities shut the entire media outlet down.<sup>13</sup> Fadhel Abbas, the leader of the smaller Al-Wahdawi opposition society, was arrested for tweets criticizing the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen and ultimately sentenced to three years in prison.<sup>14</sup>

Now, ahead of the 2018 elections, the government has simply prohibited political opposition. In July 2016, the authorities arbitrarily dissolved Al-Wefaq,<sup>15</sup> with courts rejecting all its subsequent appeals in 2017 and 2018.<sup>16</sup> Security officials shut down the society's website, closed its headquarters, and seized its assets. Less than a year later, in May 2017, the authorities took the same measures against Wa'ad, closing the group over unfounded allegations of inciting “terrorism and promoting violent and forceful overthrow of the [government]” after the society said Bahrain was experiencing a “constitutional political crisis” and criticized the closure of

<sup>7</sup> *Crushing Civil Society*, ADHRB, June 2017, [http://www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017.6.5\\_crushing-civil-society\\_web.pdf](http://www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017.6.5_crushing-civil-society_web.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> “Bahrain arrests opposition leader; U.S. shrugs,” Editorial Board, *The Washington Post*, 19 September 2013,

<sup>9</sup> *Crushing Civil Society*, ADHRB, June 2017, [http://www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017.6.5\\_crushing-civil-society\\_web.pdf](http://www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017.6.5_crushing-civil-society_web.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> “Bahraini authorities sentence scholar and activist Khalil al-Halwachi to 10 years in prison,” ADHRB, Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR), Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD), and European Center for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR), 23 March 2017; and “Profiles in Persecution: Khalil al-Halwachi,” ADHRB, 30 March 2018, <https://www.adhrb.org/2018/03/profiles-in-persecution-khalil-al-halwachi/>

<sup>11</sup> “BAHRAIN: FURTHER INFORMATION: OPPOSITION LEADER'S SENTENCE REDUCED AGAIN: SHEIKH ALI SALMAN,” Amnesty International, 13 April 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde11/6068/2017/en/>

<sup>12</sup> “NGOs Condemn Arrest of Opposition Leader Ebrahim Sharif,” ADHRB and BIRD, 13 July 2015, <https://www.adhrb.org/2015/07/ngos-condemn-arrest-of-opposition-leader-ebrahim-sharif/>; and “Bahrain Court Sentences Ebrahim Sharif to 1 Year for Peaceful Speech,” ADHRB, BCHR, BIRD, ECDHR, and Justice Human Rights Organization (JHRO), 24 February 2016, <https://www.adhrb.org/2016/02/bahrain-court-sentences-ebrahim-sharif-to-1-year-for-peaceful-speech/>

<sup>13</sup> Ian Black, “Saudi prince's Al-Arab news channel goes off air hours after launching,” *The Guardian*, 2 February 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/02/saudi-prince-alarab-news-channel>; and Rachael Diniega, “Al-Arab TV closes in Qatar following censorship in Bahrain,” ADHRB, 17 February 2017, <https://www.adhrb.org/2017/02/al-arab-tv-closes-qatar-following-censorship-bahrain/>

<sup>14</sup> “Bahraini Opposition Activist Fadhel Abbas Sentenced to Three Years in Prison on Appeal,” ADHRB, 27 October 2016, <https://www.adhrb.org/2016/10/bahraini-opposition-activist-fadhel-abbas-sentenced-three-years-prison-appeal/>

<sup>15</sup> “Bahraini court dissolves Al-Wefaq, the largest political opposition group in the country,” ADHRB, BCHR, BIRD, ECDHR, and JHRO, 17 July 2016, <https://www.adhrb.org/2016/07/repression-freedom-association-bahrain-dissolves-al-wefaq-largest-political-society-country/>

<sup>16</sup> “Bahrain Confirms Closure of Al-Wefaq, Continues Arbitrary Prosecution of its Leaders,” ADHRB, 20 February 2018, <https://www.adhrb.org/2018/02/bahrain-confirms-closure-of-al-wefaq-continues-arbitrary-prosecution-of-its-leaders/>

Al-Wefaq.<sup>17</sup> The High Court of Appeals confirmed the ruling in October 2017,<sup>18</sup> leaving the small Al-Wahdawi society as the only legal opposition group still operating in Bahrain.

Most recently, this past June the king signed an amendment to the 2002 Law on Political Rights to ban all members of the dissolved political societies, any former member of parliament who resigned, and any person sentenced to more than six months in prison from ever again running for election.<sup>19</sup> Al-Wefaq alone is said to have more than 65,000 members at its height,<sup>20</sup> and the law will prevent thousands more Bahrainis from ever pursuing political office.

Amid all this, Bahraini authorities have taken broader steps to undermine what few civil society institutions could effectively monitor the upcoming elections. In June 2017 the government indefinitely suspended<sup>21</sup> *Al-Wasat*, the country's only independent newspaper, forcing it to lay off its staff and shut down.<sup>22</sup> Courts have now sentenced Bahrain's leading human rights defender Nabeel Rajab to a total of seven years in prison,<sup>23</sup> underscoring the relentless reprisal campaign against human rights activism.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the legal destruction of the opposition, the authorities continue to harass political leaders as well. Opposition politicians face regular travel bans preventing them from leaving Bahrain to attend international events, while others have been forced into exile and punitively stripped of their Bahraini citizenship. Though Sheikh Ali Salman and two exiled Al-Wefaq leaders were recently acquitted of baseless new charges of conspiring with Qatar, the prosecution has appealed the decision and continues to seek the death penalty.<sup>25</sup> Throughout, the government has intensified pressure on Al-Wahdawi, the last remaining opposition group, with security forces repeatedly interrogating the society's current secretary-general, Hasan al-Marzooq, over "inciting protests" on social media earlier this year.

### **Abusive Electoral Practices and Additional Legal Restrictions**

Beyond this direct assault on the opposition, the Bahraini government has long taken additional steps to undermine popular representation in the lower house of parliament and control the outcomes of elections. Years of gerrymandering have ensured that the lower house does not proportionately represent Bahrain's population, with a significant majority of members representing only a small minority of the electorate.<sup>26</sup> Bahraini authorities have specifically redistricted to dilute the influence of the Shia Muslim majority, amplify that of government supporters, and prevent opposition groups like Al-Wefaq from securing a larger proportion

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<sup>17</sup> "Bahrain Dissolves Wa'ad, Last Major Opposition Society," ADHRB, 31 May 2017, <https://www.adhrb.org/2017/05/bahrain-dissolves-last-major-opposition-society/>

<sup>18</sup> "Bahraini Appeals Court Confirms Dissolution of Wa'ad, Last Major Opposition Group," ADHRB, 26 October 2017, <https://www.adhrb.org/2017/10/bahraini-appeals-court-confirms-dissolution-of-waad-last-major-opposition-group/>

<sup>19</sup> "Bahrain Moves to Ban Opposition Ahead of 2018 Elections," ADHRB, 30 May 2018, <https://www.adhrb.org/2018/05/bahrain-moves-to-ban-opposition-ahead-of-2018-elections/>

<sup>20</sup> Frederic Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf: From the Iraq War to the Arab Uprisings*, Columbia University Press, 2013, <https://cup.columbia.edu/book/sectarian-politics-in-the-gulf/9780231165136>

<sup>21</sup> "Bahrain: Press Freedom Groups Call for Lifting of Al Wasat Suspension, As Newspaper's Ban Continues," ADHRB, 8 June 2017, <https://www.adhrb.org/2017/06/bahrain-press-freedom-groups-call-lifting-al-wasat-suspension-newspapers-ban-continues/>

<sup>22</sup> "Bahrain newspaper, shut down by government, lays off staff," Business Insider, 24 June 2017, <http://www.businessinsider.com/ap-bahrain-newspaper-shut-down-by-government-lays-off-staff-2017-6>

<sup>23</sup> "UPDATED: Bahrain Sentences Nabeel Rajab to Additional 5-Year Prison Term in Blatant Violation of Free Expression," ADHRB, 21 February 2018, <https://www.adhrb.org/2018/02/bahrain-sentences-nabeel-rajab-to-additional-5-year-prison-term-in-blatant-violation-of-free-expression/>

<sup>24</sup> *Crushing Civil Society*, ADHRB, June 2017, [http://www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017.6.5\\_crushing-civil-society\\_web.pdf](http://www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017.6.5_crushing-civil-society_web.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> "UPDATED: Bahrain's Public Prosecutor Will Appeal Verdict of Acquitted Opposition Leader Sheikh Ali Salman – Trial Date Set for 5 September," ADHRB, 21 June 2018, <https://www.adhrb.org/2018/06/ngos-call-on-bahrain-to-drop-charges-release-opposition-leader-sheikh-ali-salman/>

<sup>26</sup> Fahad Desmukh. "Gerrymandering in Bahrain: Twenty-one persons, one vote." *Bahrain Watch*. <https://bahrainwatch.org/blog/2013/02/11/gerrymandering-in-bahrain-twenty-one-persons-one-vote/>.

of ballots.<sup>27</sup> In 2010, for example, the average Shia-majority district contained 9,533 constituents compared with just 6,186 for the average Sunni-majority district.<sup>28</sup> Al-Wefaq, whose constituency is principally Shia, cited this history of discriminatory districting, especially after the collapse of the National Dialogue, as a major motivating factor in its decision to boycott the 2014 elections.<sup>29</sup> Academics have found that sectarian redistricting has also largely hurt the “populist and secular candidates,” resulting in a lower house “permanently divided among Sunni Islamists [and] loyalist tribal ‘independents.’”<sup>30</sup> This trend has been solidified with the ultimate dissolution of the opposition groups altogether. In other cases, the government has completely eliminated municipalities against the will of the district’s leadership, such as in 2014, when the king unilaterally abolished the Central Governorate – one of just five governorates.

There is also evidence that the authorities have granted dual citizenship to Saudi nationals, and expedited citizenship for foreign Sunnis employed in the security forces,<sup>31</sup> in order to further alter the country’s demographics and influence voting patterns. In 2002, the government reportedly transported thousands of members of Saudi Arabia’s al-Dawasir tribe across the causeway into Bahrain to vote in that year’s parliamentary election.<sup>32</sup> Since then, the government has established more polling stations located along the border and in other remote areas,<sup>33</sup> many of which are not even connected to specific districts, increasing the opportunity for manipulation or interference.<sup>34</sup> Though Bahrain has invited some international election observers in the past, these are typically not independent delegations, and they have not been able to monitor these isolated polling stations.

In May 2016, the government additionally amended the Law on Political Societies to specifically prohibit religious figures from participating in political groups and discussing politics during sermons, among other restrictions.<sup>35</sup> As yet, it appears the authorities have exclusively used the law to target Shia activists and predominantly-Shia political societies, like Al-Wefaq, though both Sunni and Shia political groups count clerics among their members.<sup>36</sup>

## International Responses

The scale of repression is earning increased criticism from the international community. In June 2017, five United Nations (UN) human rights experts condemned the government’s closure of Al-Wefaq and Wa’ad and its “unacceptable restrictions” on basic freedoms.<sup>37</sup> Likewise, the High Commissioner for Human Rights has repeatedly called on Bahrain to curb its repression. In his opening statement to the Human Rights Council just

<sup>27</sup> *Apart in Their Own Land: Government Discrimination Against Shia in Bahrain, Vol. I*, ADHRB, BCHR, and BIRD, April 2015, <http://www.adhrb.org/2015/03/adhrb-bird-and-bchr-publish-new-report-on-shia-discrimination/>; and Justin Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf: Rethinking the Rentier State*, Indiana University Press: 2015, Print.

<sup>28</sup> Justin Gengler, *The Political Economy of Sectarianism in the Gulf*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016, [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/Gengler\\_Sectarianism\\_Final.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/Gengler_Sectarianism_Final.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> Simon Henderson, “Beyond Islamists & Autocrats: Bahrain’s Stalled Reforms and the Future US Role,” The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 2016, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/beyond-islamists-and-autocrats-prospects-for-political-reform-post-arab-spr>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> *Sectarian Discrimination and Extremism in Bahrain’s Security Forces: Questions for US Policy*, ADHRB, 30 November 2017, <https://www.adhrb.org/2017/11/sectarian-discrimination-and-extremism-in-bahrains-security-forces-questions-for-us-policy/>

<sup>32</sup> Justin Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf: Rethinking the Rentier State*, Indiana University Press: 2015, Print.

<sup>33</sup> *Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2016 — Bahrain Country Report*, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016, [https://www.bti-project.org/fileadmin/files/BTI/Downloads/Reports/2016/pdf/BTI\\_2016\\_Bahrain.pdf](https://www.bti-project.org/fileadmin/files/BTI/Downloads/Reports/2016/pdf/BTI_2016_Bahrain.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> Justin Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf: Rethinking the Rentier State*, Indiana University Press: 2015, Print.

<sup>35</sup> Reim Alian, “Political Society Law Amendment Silences Religious Opposition,” ADHRB, 29 June 2016, <http://www.adhrb.org/2016/06/political-society-law-amendment-silences-religious-opposition/>

<sup>36</sup> Kristin Smith Diwan and Michael Esfahani, “Bahrain’s New Order,” Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, 19 August 2016, <http://www.agsi.org/bahrains-new-order/>

<sup>37</sup> “Bahrain must end worsening human rights clampdown, UN experts say,” United Nations (UN) Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 16 June 2017, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21762&LangID=E>

last month, he urged Bahrain to reverse “profoundly damaging trends” like “continued crackdowns on civil society and additional legislation which further restricts the people's fundamental rights.”<sup>38</sup> Almost simultaneously, the European Parliament adopted a new resolution explicitly denouncing Bahrain’s attacks on opposition activists and calling for new restrictions on European security assistance to the kingdom.<sup>39</sup> The Human Rights Committee is currently reviewing Bahrain’s adherence to its treaty obligations under the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights and, while the outcome is forthcoming, the kingdom has received intense scrutiny from UN experts.<sup>40</sup>

Here in the US, however, the Trump Administration has taken literally no steps to encourage political or human rights reform in Bahrain. Months into his presidency, the Mr. Trump met with Bahrain’s king and told him there would be no more strain in the relationship,<sup>41</sup> signaling that Obama-era human rights conditions would be dropped from existing F-16 sales.<sup>42</sup> Two days after their meeting, the king approved a lethal police raid on a peaceful sit-in protesting government persecution of Bahrain’s most prominent Shia religious leader – five demonstrators were killed and hundreds injured.<sup>43</sup> A month later, the king amended the constitution to allow Bahrain Defence Force (BDF) military courts to try civilians,<sup>44</sup> and the ensuing proceedings were immediately marred by allegations of torture, enforced disappearance, and other due process violations.<sup>45</sup>

The Trump Administration was undeterred, and it has since authorized even more unconditional arms deals, including attack helicopters<sup>46</sup> and bombs<sup>47</sup> that will likely contribute to the ongoing humanitarian disaster in Yemen, where the BDF is deployed. As of March 2018, the administration indicated it will maintain restrictions on new arms sales to Bahrain’s Ministry of Interior (MOI) police forces due to their direct role in domestic repression and human rights abuse,<sup>48</sup> but the State Department actually appears to be boosting overall engagement with the MOI. The administration has continued Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining and Related Programs (NADR) funding for MOI units like the notorious riot police and it has now proposed a ten-point “training plan [for the police] through 2019,”<sup>49</sup> despite the MOI’s past failure to pass Leahy Law vetting due to ongoing gross violations of human rights.<sup>50</sup> The administration may even be looking to transfer Bahrain

<sup>38</sup> “Opening statement and global update of human rights concerns by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein at 38th session of the Human Rights Council,” UN Human Rights Council, 18 June 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=23206&LangID=E>

<sup>39</sup> “NGOs Welcome European Parliament Resolution on Nabeel Rajab and Bahrain,” ADHRB, BIRD, and ECDHR, 14 June 2018, <https://www.adhrb.org/2018/06/ngos-welcome-european-parliament-resolution-on-nabeel-rajab-and-bahrain/>

<sup>40</sup> “ADHRB finds that Bahrain is in Near-Total Violation of the ICCPR,” ADHRB, 9 July 2018, <https://www.adhrb.org/2018/07/adhrb-finds-that-bahrain-is-in-near-total-violation-of-the-iccpr/>

<sup>41</sup> “Trump says ties with Bahrain won’t be strained anymore,” Reuters, 21 May 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-saudi-bahrain/trump-says-ties-with-bahrain-wont-be-strained-anymore-idUSKCN18H05Y>

<sup>42</sup> Carol Morello, “State Department drops human rights as condition for fighter jet sale to Bahrain,” 29 March 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/state-department-drops-human-rights-as-condition-for-fighter-jet-sale-to-bahrain/2017/03/29/6762d422-1abf-406e-aaff-fbc5a6a2e0ac\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.bb0a7a77a2ff](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/state-department-drops-human-rights-as-condition-for-fighter-jet-sale-to-bahrain/2017/03/29/6762d422-1abf-406e-aaff-fbc5a6a2e0ac_story.html?utm_term=.bb0a7a77a2ff); and Sam Jones, “Letting Bahrain Buy F-16s Won’t Make It a More Stable Ally,” 28 April 2017, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2017/04/letting-bahrain-buy-f-16s-wont-make-it-more-stable-ally/137427/>

<sup>43</sup> “Bahrain Police Raid Duraz Sit-in, Killing Five and Injuring Dozens,” ADHRB, BIRD, and ECDHR, 23 May 2017, <https://www.adhrb.org/2017/05/12478/>

<sup>44</sup> “Bahrain's king approves military trials for civilians,” BBC, 3 April 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-39478101>

<sup>45</sup> “Bahrain Military Court Death Sentences Ratified but Reduced to Life Imprisonment,” ADHRB, 26 April 2018, <https://www.adhrb.org/2018/04/bahrain-military-court-death-sentences-ratified-but-reduced-to-life-imprisonment-2018/>

<sup>46</sup> “Trump Administration Approves new Arms Sales to Bahrain Despite Military Abuses,” ADHRB, 1 May 2018, <https://www.adhrb.org/2018/05/trump-administration-approves-new-arms-sales-to-bahrain-despite-military-abuses/>

<sup>47</sup> Joe Gould, “Bahrain cleared to buy 3,200 US bomb bodies for its F-16 fighters,” Defense News, 18 May 2018, <https://www.defensenews.com/air/2018/05/18/bahrain-cleared-to-buy-3200-us-bombs-for-its-f-16-fighters/>

<sup>48</sup> “U.S. Security Cooperation With Bahrain,” Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Department of State, United States Government, 23 March 2018, <https://www.state.gov/t/pm/rls/fs/2018/279536.htm>

<sup>49</sup> *Congressional Budget Justification Fiscal Year 2019 - Foreign Operations: Appendix 2*, Department of State, United States Government, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/279517.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> *Bahrain Country Report on Terrorism 2014*, Department of State, United States Government, 2015, <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2014/239407.htm>

another *Perry*-class frigate according to amendment language for the current NDAA<sup>51</sup>—an unmistakable sign of American support for the kingdom’s worsening abuses.

## **Conclusion and Policy Recommendations**

The elections are an opportunity for Bahrain to demonstrate a real commitment to reconciliation, laying the groundwork for sustainable political development and stability. This is clearly in American interests.

But if the elections were held tomorrow, they would make a mockery of the democratic process – and the US would be firmly entrenched on the wrong side of history. At this juncture there is no space for real participation and the government will effectively dictate the results. The US has a moral and political obligation to use the considerable leverage of its security partnership with Bahrain to set out clear criteria by which to judge these elections as free and fair, and to call for immediate requisite reforms such as the release of political prisoners. Absent this, the Trump administration will be aiding and abetting Bahrain’s continued descent down a path of tension, instability, and dictatorship. We therefore urge Congress and the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission to take the following measures to stimulate reform:

- Pressure Bahrain to release all political prisoners, including Sheikh Ali Salman, Hassan Mushaima, Dr. Abduljalil al-Singace, and Abdulwahab Hussain; reinstate arbitrarily dissolved opposition groups like Al-Wefaq and Wa’ad; and repeal legislation banning their members from seeking election.
- Pass legislation blocking further arms sales and security assistance to Bahrain pending verifiable progress toward democratic reforms and human rights protections, such as the implementation of BICI and UPR recommendations.
- Request the Trump administration publicly delineate criteria for assessing the elections as free and fair.
- Call on the State Department and the Treasury Department to use the Global Magnitsky Act to sanction Bahraini officials implicated in political repression and other rights violations, including the torture and arbitrary detention of political leaders and human rights defenders.

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<sup>51</sup> “AMENDMENT TO RULES COMMITTEE PRINT 115- 70 OFFERED BY MR. ROYCE OF CALIFORNIA,” House of Representatives, Congress, United States Government, 2018, [https://amendments-rules.house.gov/amendments/ROYCE\\_118\\_xml%20\(003\)516181333223322.pdf](https://amendments-rules.house.gov/amendments/ROYCE_118_xml%20(003)516181333223322.pdf)