

**After the BICI Report: What Next for Bahrain?**  
**Senator Ron Wyden**  
***As prepared for delivery***  
**Monday, December 5th, 2011**  
**Kenney Auditorium, SAIS**

Good afternoon everyone. I want to thank the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED) for hosting this very important discussion. It is obviously a *very* exciting time for democracy activists who are engaged with the Middle East and I'd like to thank POMED for their important work.

As you all probably know, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry released its report on November 23. The Commission has confirmed what others have been reporting about the human rights violations that took place during the protests that began earlier this year. The Commission documented reports of torture, including deaths that resulted from such torture; masked men beating Bahraini citizens in their own homes in the dead of night; and mass firings of anyone that supported the protestors. The repression was systemic and widespread.

You also probably know that on September 14 the Administration notified Congress of its intent to sell Bahrain 53 million dollars worth of weapons to the very same regime that had begun violently cracking down on its own citizens. It was quite a list. Forty-four HUMVEES, 200 wired guided missiles, 50 bunker busting missiles, missile launchers and night vision sets.

The problem, however, is that our country should not be rewarding a regime that has fired on peacefully assembled protestors, indiscriminately imprisoned its citizens simply for voicing a political viewpoint, and stifling basic human freedoms.

That is what led me to introduce Senate Joint Resolution 28, which would stop the proposed arms sale to Bahrain until certain conditions were met. My friend and colleague, Congressman McGovern from the House of Representatives, joined me in this effort.

After we introduced the Resolution, and after several colleagues from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee joined me in raising the issue with the State Department, the Administration agreed to carefully review the Commission's findings and consult with Congress before proceeding with any additional steps related to the arms sale.

I think that the Independent Commission's report has shown the wisdom of stopping the arms sale.

Imagine if everyone in Congress had kept quiet and this arms sale had been completed. What kind of message would this have sent the world or to the people aspiring for freedom and democracy?

America should NOT be rewarding brutal regimes with arms. It's that simple.

Now that we've had the chance to review the Commission's findings, it is clear that the Bahraini government must immediately begin to implement the reforms recommended by the Independent Commission. This includes, but is not limited to:

1. Holding all public officials accountable for their role in the abuses;
2. Reforming the Bahraini National Security Agency, Ministry of Interior, and Bahrain Defense Forces, all of which were involved in the systematic issue of torture against protestors; and
3. Implementing legislative changes as recommended by the national commission that is being formed

However, progress must also be made in areas not covered by the Commission's report.

While the Commission's recommendations are necessary, they are not sufficient. Because of its narrow mandate, the Commission was not able to touch on other issues that have to be addressed.

In addition to the report's recommendations, I'd like to see the Bahraini government make significant and measurable progress on the following before the U.S. proceeds with the arms sale.

1. The Government of Bahrain should allow, and fully cooperate with, independent human rights organizations and observers, including U.N. bodies such as the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, to investigate claims of human rights abuses, and to monitor the Government of Bahrain's progress in adopting the Commission's recommendations.
2. The Government of Bahrain should unconditionally release peaceful members of the opposition who have been detained without charge or convicted and sentenced for political offenses.
3. The Government of Bahrain should allow access by local and international journalists to activists, protest sites, hospitals and other public institutions.
4. The regime must also make measurable progress in reforming the government of Bahrain to provide citizens with a larger role in deciding who governs them and ensuring that all Bahrainis have equal representation.

Until we see measurable progress on these fronts, and on the recommendations made by the Commission report, I will continue to raise objections to the proposed arms sale to Bahrain.

I agree with what Secretary of State Clinton said a few weeks back: "meaningful reform and equal treatment for all Bahrainis are in Bahrain's interest, in the region's interest, and in ours."

I hope that she and her colleagues at the State Department are taking a very hard look at this report and realize that now is not the time to reward the government of Bahrain with an arms sale.

As the Middle East continues to undergo seismic change, I want to underscore how important it is that we make the right decisions in the region during this critical and formative time. Our actions should reflect our support for democracy and must be consistent with our nation's values and ideals.

As I've stated before, rewarding regimes that violently suppress peaceful civil dissent and violate human rights with multi-million dollar arms sale is just simply inconsistent with these values.

The U.S. and Bahrain have a long history of cooperation and partnership. It is often said that they are our one of our best friends in the Gulf region, and serve as an important strategic ally against Iran. I don't dispute any of that.

What I disagree with is the concept that this earns the regime a free pass to kill and torture its own people and create a culture where your religion determines if you can work in government or join the police force or play on a soccer team.

Being friends with Bahrain should make it easier for us to point out when they go astray, not harder. After all, isn't that what friends do for each other? This is our chance to warn our friends in Bahrain that their current path leads toward peril.

The people of Bahrain will not stop pushing for freedom, equal opportunity, and representative government. Like people everywhere, they thirst for equality and a chance to control their own destiny. This transition may be gradual, but it must begin now, or, as we have seen, the country of Bahrain, and potentially the entire region, will continue to be rocked by instability.

Bahrain clearly has much work to do to properly address the atrocities that were committed earlier this year. My hope is that the Government of Bahrain will do what's best for its people and will implement meaningful and serious reforms. I also hope that all parties will engage in an honest and substantial national dialogue to address the past so that the country can best move forward. Without genuine and fully representative dialogue, progress will be much harder to come by.

In closing, I think everyone here is grateful for the Commission's efforts in producing a quality report, even with a somewhat limited mandate. I think the text provides all interested parties with a good starting point for the process of reconciliation and progress towards a more democratic and inclusive society.

I look forward to seeing concrete and measurable results in the months ahead. It won't be easy, but I know that Bahrain is capable of moving forward and that, in the end, the alliance between our two countries will endure.