

July 31, 2014

The Honorable Susan Rice
National Security Advisor
600 17th St NW
Washington, DC 20508-0001

Dear Ambassador Rice,

We are deeply troubled by the Bahraini expulsion of Tom Malinowski, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. In February of this year, Secretary Kerry called upon the United States Senate to confirm Mr. Malinowski to lead an urgent mission “to defend the rights of people all around the world.” With this recent action against him by the Bahraini government, that mission is being openly challenged. We urge you to take swift and strong action against this decision, to assert the importance of Assistant Secretary Malinowski’s work in Bahrain, and worldwide.

The United States has enjoyed a close relationship with the Kingdom of Bahrain for decades, and the expulsion of such a high-ranking visiting U.S. diplomat – by any foreign government – is unprecedented. Expelling Mr. Malinowski not only brings into question the Government of Bahrain’s stated commitment to the National Dialogue process, but also its respect for the longstanding U.S.-Bahrain relationship. The U.S. response to this action should demonstrate the gravity of this move by denying visas for any Bahraini government officials to visit the United States and fully suspending all arms sales and transfers to the country.

Since his expulsion, the Government of Bahrain has also brought charges on two members of the opposition al-Wefaq political society, Sheikh Ali Salman and Khalil al-Marzooq, for meeting with Assistant Secretary Malinowski. They have been charged under a law which prohibits contact between foreign officials and opposition leaders and civil society without the presence of a Bahraini government representative; the U.S. State Department has repeatedly called for this law to be rescinded. The charges against al-Wefaq leaders significantly undermine any efforts toward reconciliation and the success of the National Dialogue, and constrain the space needed for political negotiations to occur.

Existing U.S. policy has neither compelled the Government of Bahrain to honor its stated commitments, nor has it contributed to improving the relationship with the United States. This unprecedented move by the Kingdom of Bahrain should be a deep cause for concern to the bilateral relationship, and the long-term dependability of Bahrain as a U.S. ally. U.S. security interests in Bahrain, including the presence of the Fifth Fleet of the U.S. Navy, are now secured by an increasingly erratic, paranoid, and internally divided host government.

If U.S. entreaties in Bahrain are to be taken seriously, the United States must urgently revise its approach. In response to these developments, we urge you to convene all relevant interagency officials to conduct a thorough review of the bilateral relationship with Bahrain, in consultation with international and Bahraini civil society organizations. With the recent nomination of William Roebuck as Ambassador-designate to the country, this is an opportune time to develop and implement a new approach in Bahrain.

The U.S.-Bahrain relationship has a number of diplomatic, economic and strategic facets that should be considered in a comprehensive strategic review. These include, but should not be limited to: bilateral military cooperation and arms sales, military assistance and training; the U.S.-Bahrain Free Trade Agreement; multilateral options through the United Nations; and targeted sanctions against individual Bahraini officials responsible for systematic human rights violations. The U.S. should reconsider how it engages with Bahraini government officials, opposition leaders, and independent civil society in the country, and illustrate that U.S. officials will continue to meet regularly -- and unapologetically -- with all segments of society in Bahrain.

Finally, the Bahraini government must apologize for the expulsion of Assistant Secretary Malinowski and welcome him back to the country, as well as drop the charges against Sheikh Ali Salman and Khalil al-Marzooq. Until these steps are taken and

the thorough review of the bilateral relationship is complete, the complete suspension of U.S. visas for visiting Bahraini government officials as well as the suspension of all arms sales and transfers should remain in place.

These recommendations are meant to be strong, which we believe are warranted because the expulsion of an assistant secretary is an unprecedented violation of diplomatic norms by a U.S. ally. The Bahraini action not only harms the U.S.-Bahrain strategic relationship, it also threatens the ability of the United States to advocate for democracy or human rights worldwide.

This is a turning point in U.S.-Bahraini relations, and a strategic review would be an opportunity to weigh the multiple components of this complex and important relationship. We urge you to respond swiftly and forcefully to the expulsion of Mr. Malinowski from Bahrain, as failing to do so would endanger U.S. strategic interests in Bahrain and undermine American credibility globally.

Sincerely,

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*This letter reflects the views of the individual signatories; institutional affiliations are listed for the purpose of identification only.