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Americans for Democracy
& Human Rights in Bahrain



Human Rights Groups Condemn Increase in UK Arms Sales to Bahrain

29 September 2014—London—Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB), the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR), the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD) and Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) strongly condemn the United Kingdom’s recent decision to increase the sale of arms to Bahrain. Furthermore, we raise serious concerns that the escalating arms trade and deepening of military ties between an ostensible defender of democracy and a government bent on suppressing the democratic will of its people undermines the international community’s cries of deep concern over the situation in Bahrain.

“The British government needs to seriously rethink its policy towards supplying arms to the Government of Bahrain. We’ve seen in the past that the Bahraini government is willing to use these weapons on its own people; what’s to stop them from doing so again?” said Nabeel Rajab, co-founder of BCHR.

Contradicting its public support for human rights, the U.K. has quietly brokered arms deals with Bahrain for years. These transactions have actually increased since Bahrain’s crackdown on the democratic protest movement which started in February 2011. Since then, the U.K. has supplied the Bahraini government with £69,726,115 in direct military and dual-use assistance. In contrast, from 2008 through the first month of 2011 Bahrain received roughly £16 million in UK military support.

"The UK government is not just silent in the face of Bahrain's ongoing human rights abuses: it is actively enabling repression by whitewashing the regime and giving it practical and moral support with arms sales," said Sarah Waldron, Campaign Coordinator for CAAT.

The rise of the Islamic State has provided the U.K. with a pretext to strengthen its relationship with Manama, leading discussions to establish a new British military base in Bahrain and to increase its military presence in the island nation.

“We have seen how the presence of the United States Fifth Fleet has shielded the Bahraini government from international pressure,” said ADHRB Executive Director Husain Abdulla. “As demonstrated by the United States’ recent diplomatic struggles with Bahrain, if the U.K. thinks that arms deals will provide them with a regional partner or grant them leverage over Bahrain’s ruling elite, they are mistaken.”

Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei, BIRD’s Advocacy Director, stated, “We are deeply troubled by the U.K. government’s efforts to tighten its military bonds with Bahrain. At a time when the international community is seeking to pressure the Bahraini government into ending its considerable human rights abuses, a unilateral action like this will only empower its authoritarian rulers.”

ADHRB, BCHR, BIRD and CAAT call on the United Kingdom to immediately end its arms trade with Bahrain, to cancel any current contracts.