

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

June 10, 2015

The President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As a strong supporter of a mutually beneficial relationship with the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), I write to urge you to reconsider the designation of Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates as major non-NATO allies. While maintaining strong defense relations with these allies is vital, I am deeply concerned that the GCC governments' continued suppression of civil and political rights will contribute to future instability and threaten the long-term security of U.S. interests in the region.

History has shown that the conferral of major non-NATO ally (MNNA) status—and the expanded military and economic cooperation which it entails — does little to incentivize reform within such countries. Countries that have recently joined this elite group do not share many of the democratic values of traditional NATO member states, and have not moved substantively in that direction since being designated as MNNAs. For example, although your predecessor designated Bahrain as a major non-NATO ally in 2002, its government violently suppressed a peaceful, popular movement for democratic reform in 2011. Other major non-NATO allies including Pakistan, Thailand and Egypt also have deeply troubling human rights records and have experienced notable internal upheavals, which have been violently repressed by their respective national security forces. Before granting the rest of the GCC states this status, the U.S. government should carefully consider not only whether these strengthened partnerships will aid our allies' immediate military effectiveness, but also whether this designation will influence them to make the reforms necessary for their long-term stability.

In the case of the GCC states, it is unlikely that MNNA status will push them to enact such reforms. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has an extended record of internal repression and human rights violations. Peaceful proponents of political reform, like human rights lawyer Waleed Abu al-Khair and liberal activist Raif Badawi, have been sentenced to lengthy prison terms for their advocacy. The rights of women—who cannot make important decisions without the permission of a male guardian—are severely restricted. Furthermore, Saudi governing officials often deny equal access to government services and positions to religious minority populations.

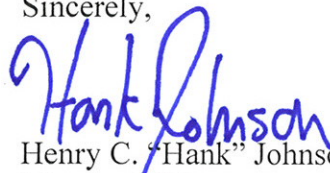
The governments of Saudi Arabia's immediate neighbors, Oman, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, have similarly concerning records. In Oman, state authorities restrict freedom of expression, including in the media and online. The United Arab Emirates continues to detain multiple prisoners of conscience sentenced at the conclusion of unfair trials. In Qatar and across


the region, migrant workers face extensive exploitation and abuse while remaining inadequately protected under the law.

Mr. President, you recently stated that the closing of legitimate avenues for the expression of grievances within the GCC states poses a significant threat to their internal stability. By extension, this threat challenges our ability to combat the spread of violent extremism and secure a stable global energy market, among the protection of other crucial regional interests.

While I recognize a need to strengthen security ties with our GCC partners, I caution that such moves should be reconsidered. We should withhold major non-NATO ally status from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman until they have altered these regressive policies which contribute to internal instability. Thank you for your attention to these important concerns.

Sincerely,

  
Henry C. "Hank" Johnson  
Member of Congress

  
James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress