



6 October 2011

RE: Proposed U.S. arms sale to Bahrain

Dear Senator,

Amnesty International is extremely concerned that a proposed arms sale to Bahrain, now being considered by the U.S. Congress, will contribute further to serious human rights violations if approved. We urge the U.S. government to immediately suspend the current proposed sale of armored vehicles and rockets to Bahrain, and to refrain from authorizing other transfers of weaponry, munitions, and related equipment to the Bahraini military, security and police forces as long as there remains a substantial risk that such arms will be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of human rights.

The U.S. Department of Defense notified Congress on 14 September of a proposal to sell equipment – including 44 armored Humvees, over 50 bunker-buster missiles, and night-vision technology – for the Bahraini armed forces. This proposed sale poses a substantial risk of contributing to further grave violations of human rights in Bahrain. During the brutal crackdown on protestors that began in February of this year, the Bahraini armed forces used tanks, armored vehicles, small arms and projectile weapons to inflict deaths and injuries in repeated acts of excessive force. The arms were also used indirectly to facilitate other human rights violations.

The current proposal by the U.S. Department of Defense is the first proposed sale by the U.S. government since the Bahraini government cracked down on peaceful protestors demanding greater political freedom in February 2011. The Department's press release on the proposed sale refers to the government of Bahrain as "an important force for political stability and economic progress in the Middle East." This stands in stark contrast to President Obama's declaration of support in May to those protesting for freedom throughout the region, when he said: "If you take the risks that reform entails, you will have the full support of the United States." Moreover, the President condemned "mass arrests and brute force" by the Bahraini government.

The misuse of weaponry in Bahrain this year began during the worst violence perpetrated on 17 February. During an early morning raid on those camped at Pearl Roundabout, massed ranks of riot police stormed the area to evict the mostly sleeping protesters, using tear gas, batons and rubber bullets to disperse them. Tanks and armored vehicles later blocked access to the roundabout. Five people were fatally wounded and at least 250 were injured, some critically. Among the injured were people clearly identified as medical workers who were targeted by police while trying to help people wounded by the security forces. Amnesty International identified U.S.-made tear gas canisters amongst some of the ammunition collected by people following the 17 February raid by riot police on Pearl Roundabout.

In mid-March, after several weeks of continuing protests, the Bahraini government again used arms and other means to brutally suppress the protests. On March 15, around 1,000 Peninsula Shield Forces, mainly in Saudi Arabian tanks, went to Bahrain across the 26km causeway from Saudi Arabia, joined by police from the UAE. Bahrain's King imposed a state of emergency and authorized the armed forces to do what they wanted to end the revolt. For the next two days, protected by the Peninsula Shield Forces, Bahraini riot police and army fired at protesters. At least six people were killed. The Al-Salmaniya Medical Complex in Manama, which had treated hundreds of injured protesters, was surrounded by military checkpoints with tanks and masked security personnel. Riot police and plain-clothed security forces used shotguns, rubber bullets and tear gas against demonstrators in Manama, Sitra and Ma'ameer.

At least 34 Bahrainis, including at least two policemen, lost their lives during the protests, and hundreds of protestors were arrested, very often without judicial warrant. Many held in police stations or in the Criminal Investigations Directorate have reportedly been tortured during interrogation. Four people died in custody under suspicious circumstances.

A National Safety Court (military court) was established as provided for by the State of National Safety (state of emergency). Scores of detainees, including prominent opposition activists, health workers, teachers, students and human rights activists,

appeared before this court on a wide range of charges, including participation in illegal demonstrations, attempting to overthrow the regime by force, inciting hatred of the regime, propagating false information and occupying by force public places. Trials before this court did not meet international standards for fair trial. Some of the defendants have been released on bail. More than 2,500 people were dismissed or suspended from their jobs, mostly in the private sector.

Before the brutal crackdown, and in spite of a pattern of human rights violations in Bahrain, the U.S. government had repeatedly authorized arms transfers to the Bahraini armed forces. In 2010, commercial sales worth \$764,249 were approved under classifications covering firearms, close assault weapons and combat shotguns (non-automatic and semi-automatic firearms) and components, parts and associated equipment. In 2009, the U.S. authorized \$113,538 of articles classified as components, parts and associated equipment, and \$801,839 classified as ammunition and ordnance. In 2008, the U.S. had authorized \$52,117 classified as non-automatic and semi-automatic firearms, \$108,000 as ammunition and \$18,795 worth of tear gas and riot control agents under a category which covers toxic agents including chemical and biological agents. In 2007, the U.S. authorized \$493,300 of tear gas and riot control agents.

The danger that such arms will be used to facilitate and perpetuate the pattern of gross violations of human rights in Bahrain has been recognized by other governments. On 17 February, the French government suspended the export of security equipment to Bahrain. On 18 February, the UK government revoked 24 individual licenses and 20 open licenses for Bahrain. On 7 March, the Spanish government suspended the licensing of arms exports to Bahrain. On 29 March, the Belgium Flemish Minister stated in Parliament that licenses for Bahrain had been put on hold.

Amnesty International urges the U.S. government to immediately suspend the current proposed sale of armored vehicles and rockets to Bahrain, and to refrain from authorizing other transfers of weaponry, munitions, and related equipment to the Bahraini military, security and police forces as long as there remains a substantial risk

that such arms will be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of human rights. We further urge the U.S. government to carry out an urgent, comprehensive review of all arms supplies and training support to Bahrain's military, security and police forces, to prevent any such supplies and support from being used to contribute to gross violations of human rights.

Thank you for giving this matter your urgent attention. Please contact Sanjeev Bery, Advocacy Director on Middle East / North Africa affairs, with questions and concerns. He can be reached at [sbery@aiusa.org](mailto:sbery@aiusa.org) or (202) 675-8755.

Yours sincerely,



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