

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 13, 2011

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

Bahrain is the United States' oldest ally in the Persian Gulf. It has generously hosted the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet for many years and consistently pursued a responsible foreign policy. Until recently, Bahrain had taken some important steps in the direction of greater political and civil rights for its population, although this progress was sometimes greater on paper than in practice.

Since February, the people of Bahrain have peacefully demanded democratic reforms and respect for the basic human rights honored in the United States and guaranteed in several international agreements to which Bahrain is a party. I appreciate Bahrain's concern about Iranian ambitions in the region and the potential threat to the country's stability, but I believe the government's response to the disturbances actually threatens the country's long-term stability, jeopardizes United States' standing in Bahrain and the Middle East, and plays into the hands of Iran. It is in the U.S. interest as well as the long-term interest of Bahrain to return as quickly as possible to a course that reaffirms the right of citizens to protest peacefully and moves the country on the path to a fully constitutional monarchy.

It is in that context that I urge the administration to review the proposed arms sale to Bahrain and to delay any item in that package that could be used to disrupt, monitor, or otherwise restrict the Bahraini people's right to peacefully assemble and petition their government.

I am encouraged by some of the steps taken by the Bahraini Government, such as the creation of an independent commission to investigate the protests and ensuing events, and the nullification by Bahraini judicial officials of the prison terms that had been given to Bahraini doctors and nurses for simply attending to injured demonstrators. Nevertheless, proceeding with the announced arms sale to Bahrain without modification under the current circumstances weakens U.S. credibility at a critical time of political transition in the Middle East.

While the President has spoken about events in Bahrain, more tangible measures should be pursued to send a clear message to the Bahraini people and government. I urge the Administration to delay the sale of any items within the proposed weapons package that could be used to disrupt peaceful dissent at least until the independent commission investigating the events in February and March announces its findings.

I look forward to working with you to encourage peaceful political transitions at this historic moment in the Middle East.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Marco Rubio
United States Senator