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**From:** Marcelle M. Wahba <[marcelle.wahba@agsiw.org](mailto:marcelle.wahba@agsiw.org)>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, July 13, 2016 4:13 PM  
**To:** Yousef Al Otaiba  
**Subject:** Re: Bost Globe: Tiny Bahrain poses big headache for US

Dear Yousef, Steve was invited to write an OpEd to explain why the US cannot "force" change on close allies and I think he answered that question in as balanced a manner as possible. The stupid headline and picture was the choice of the Boston Globe editors. You will note Steve wrote the Oped as an individual and there is absolutely no mention of his affiliation to AGSIW in the article.

I'm sorry to hear that you are getting a lot of complaints by GCC Ambassadors; I expected we would always hear some but not many. I am doing my absolute very best to run a credible and balanced think tank where the high caliber team we have hired feel comfortable working and producing good programs and publications that are as fair and balanced as possible. We will keep trying to do so and hope that the GCC ambassadors who complain to you will also let you know when they see an excellent paper or program at AGSIW like the 100+ people who signed up for yesterday's program on Saudi Vision 2030. I hope that they will begin to realize that AGSIW is making a positive difference in the Washington environment towards their countries precisely because we are considered balanced and credible.

Regards, marcelle

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On Jul 13, 2016, at 3:46 PM, Yousef Al Otaiba <otaiba7@hotmail.com> wrote:

Marcelle,

Having GCC ambassadors complain to me about this coverage is not helpful.

This keeps happening and its very unhelpful.

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**From:** Abdulla Bin Mohamed <jernas1@gmail.com>

**Sent:** Wednesday, July 13, 2016 3:42 PM

**To:** يوسف العتيبه

**Subject:** Bost Globe: Tiny Bahrain poses big headache for US

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<https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2016/06/30/how-condones-bahrain-bad-behavior/L92ihKmPMC5PvCmj6tedaJ/story.html>

# Tiny Bahrain poses big headache for US



HASAN JAMALI/ASSOCIATED PRESS

A masked Bahraini anti-government protester holds a picture of jailed Shiite cleric Sheik Ali Salman, the head of the opposition al-Wefaq political association, as riot police fire tear gas canisters in Jan. 2015. Last month, Bahrain said it has suspended all activities by Al-Wefaq, the largest Shiite opposition political group, and frozen its assets amid a widening crackdown on dissent.

By Stephen Seche | JUNE 30, 2016

FOR ANYONE LABORING under the misapprehension that the United States, as the world's sole superpower, should be able to exercise unfettered influence over the conduct of other nations — even those we count as friends — allow me to introduce you to the Kingdom of Bahrain.

With a population of 1.3 million, nearly half of whom are expatriates from East and South Asia, Bahrain is a postage-stamp-sized monarchy just a stone's throw from Iran, across the waters of the Persian Gulf.

It is a longtime and faithful US military partner, a major non-NATO ally, and, since the Arab Awakening-inspired civil unrest of 2011 that led to a large-scale and very public crackdown on its Shi'ite majority, a constant reminder of the limits of America's power to persuade.

Things got so bad that the Obama administration in 2011 suspended the sale of armored vehicles and TOW missiles, responding to congressional and other concerns that at least the Humvees could be used by internal security services against Bahraini citizens peacefully expressing discontent with their government.

Sales of weapons deemed necessary for external defense were resumed the following year. The move was based on modest progress the government of Bahrain had made in addressing deficiencies identified by an independent investigation conducted in the wake of the violence in 2011 — and in an effort to strengthen the hand of Bahrain's reformist crown prince, by demonstrating that choosing the path of reconciliation would yield rewards.

Lately, though, the government of Bahrain has reenergized its efforts to stifle political dissent. In June, it moved to suspend the largest and most prominent Shi'ite political society (political parties as such are prohibited) known as al-Wifaq. Depending on whose estimate you believe, Shi'ites make up between 56 and 70 percent of Bahrain's population; the ruling family is Sunni. At the request of the government, an appeals court more than doubled the jail term of al-Wifaq's secretary general on charges of "promoting change to the political system by force." Prominent human rights activist Nabeel Rajab was arrested for making false statements against the government, and the citizenship of Sheikh Isa Qassim, the spiritual leader of Bahrain's Shi'ite community, was revoked, rendering him stateless.

You might imagine that the United States — given our president’s well-established view, as expressed in an interview to journalist Jeffrey Goldberg, that “a country cannot function in the modern world when it is repressing half its population” — would be leaning heavily on Bahrain to change course. Well, we are, sort of, that is if you think statements issued by our government’s spokesmen have any significance outside the briefing room. Recently, the State Department spokesman has said that “we are concerned” about the crackdown on civil society actors, “we’re alarmed” by the decision to revoke Isa Qassim’s citizenship, “we’re deeply troubled” by the government’s move to dissolve al-Wifaq, and so on and so forth.

Yet, beyond expressions of dismay, what can we actually do? Suspend once again the sale of weapons to express the depth of our concern? Probably not, since there are no security forces wading into crowds of demonstrators in the streets. Move the US Navy’s Fifth Fleet from Bahrain to another location? Don’t count on it. The cost would be enormous, and given the likely solidarity of neighboring Arab Gulf states with Bahrain, there is absolutely no guarantee that anyone would welcome 7,000 US servicemen and women and their families and the enormous infrastructure needed to support them.

This is a source of great frustration to many people, both in and out of government: How is it that this tiny island kingdom can cavalierly ignore all of our entreaties to reconsider policies we see as divisive and ultimately destabilizing and, at the same time, expect us to rush to its defense should it face an external threat from Iran? One reason is Saudi Arabia, Bahrain’s Sunni Arab benefactor and neighbor, which enthusiastically supports — and likely encourages — its hard-line positions.

In 2012, Tom Malinowski, before he became assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights, and labor, argued that the United States should suspend visas and access to the US banking system of all Bahraini officials credibly linked to serious human-rights violations, such as the torture of opposition activists. Of course, there are no reports of torture at the moment, and, in fact, the Bahraini government has wrapped at least some of its heavy-handed actions in the cloak of legitimacy by pointing to a measure passed by its Sunni-majority Parliament designed to remove all traces of religion from the nation’s political processes, a move that strikes right at al-Wifaq.

Still, you have to wonder if it’s not time to revive discussion of some variation on this idea, if only to remind Bahrain’s senior leadership that our patience with its behavior is not without limits. That said, actually taking such a step would require beating back strenuous opposition from the US military, which will be justifiably concerned that it would drive a wedge between us and an ally on whom we depend for support in a very unpredictable and unstable part of the world.

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And this is the problem, of course: As we do in so many countries, the United States has multiple interests in Bahrain that sometimes compete with one another for primacy. In this case, our belief that political inclusion and respect for fundamental rights are essential for stability must be weighed against Bahrain's role as a trusted security and counterterrorism partner. How we achieve the proper balance between our values and our interests — in Bahrain and elsewhere in the world — is a question as complex as it is unwelcome, for this president and whomever succeeds him.

*Stephen Seche spent 35 years as a career foreign service officer. He is former deputy assistant secretary of state for Arabian peninsula affairs and served as the US ambassador to Yemen from 2007 to 2010.*