

RELEASE IN PART B6

From: Sullivan, Jacob J <SullivanJJ@state.gov>
Sent: Monday, July 4, 2011 12:14 PM
To: H
Subject: Fw: Bahrain

Here you go...

----- Original Message -----

From: Feltman, Jeffrey D
Sent: Monday, July 04, 2011 11:34 AM
To: <[REDACTED]> <[REDACTED]>; Posner, Michael H; [REDACTED]
<[REDACTED]>; Schlicher, Ronald L; Sanderson, Janet A; Wittes, Tamara C
Cc: Sullivan, Jacob J; Burns, William J
Subject: Bahrain

B6

Hi from Kuwait, where I'm waiting for the flight to Iraq. While more complete reporting will be on the other side, I wanted to share a few impressions from Bahrain.

The positive statements from the White House and State Department regarding the formation of the Royal Commission of Inquiry (COI) and start of the National Dialogue seem to have taken the sting out of the bilateral relationship provoked by the Geneva statement of a couple of weeks ago. The FM thanked us explicitly for the statements. (Officials did find the U.S. singling out of Wifaq's participation to be odd, however.). If they ever truly did, I no longer sense that GOB officials are questioning our shared security partnership, concern with Iran, etc. But they know they remain under intensely close scrutiny over human rights issues, and they know they have lots of homework to do to rebuild Bahrain's reputation.

I went over with the FM the general approach we're taking toward licensing (with a likely suspension of consideration for lethal and riot gear for the MOI for 90 days, but resumption of normal consideration for the BDF and the MOI unit in Afghanistan), and he was comfortable with where we are. We talked about the AFL-CIO petition and how to use that public process to highlight any positive steps the GOB has taken.

In my view, the COI is one of three potentially positive developments. If the COI is in practice as serious as its chair and its mandate, and the GOB accepts and deals effectively and transparently with the COI's findings, we will be in a new and positive phase here. But this will take time, as the COI's findings aren't due until the end of October, after the legislative by-elections (9/24) and the end of the National Dialogue.

The other two potentially positive developments are the transfer of court cases to the civilian judiciary and the reinstatement of employees dismissed during the crackdown. If carried out transparently and quickly (which seems to be the government's intention), these steps can greatly improve the atmosphere, which will help the National Dialogue's chance for success. But in both of these areas, much work needs to be done.

In the case of the court cases, defendants don't seem to know their status, and there are estimates of 100-150 people still held without any kind of arraignments. We had a good meeting with the Minister of Justice and went over all of this. He really seems to "get it" and want to do the right thing.

On the labor issues, the Minister of Labor reported to the cabinet yesterday the results of his Washington trip. So the GOB is very aware of the skepticism people have about the numbers (with huge discrepancies between GOB numbers of dismissed and reinstated and those of the labor federation). The ministers we saw insist that they are under a ten-day

deadline from the King to get the reinstatements cleared up. As with the court cases, we urged full transparency as well as outreach to the labor unions.

Now, the National Dialogue. We'll see, but I don't sense overwhelming optimism for real progress there. As others have noted, it's rather formulaic and rigidly structured, and it's far from clear that the government reps share the goal of real reform. The sort of backchannel and sideroom discussions that could make the dialogue succeed don't seem to be starting yet. Of course we encouraged such substantive contact, while emphasizing that the more steps that all can take to rebuild trust and improve the atmosphere, the more likely it will be that the dialogue succeeds. It's not clear to me, however, that people have any idea what success will look like. But this just started, and things could look up as the give-and-take proceeds.

Steve Seche is on the ground and warmly welcomed by the Bahrainis; Stephanie Williams left for a well-deserved break today, after hosting the July 4th event last night.

I kept this relatively brief trip lower profile than usual and did not engage the media nor see the political societies. This - my eighth trip to Manama since February -- was a trip for quiet discussions with GOB officials behind closed doors.

Now, off to Basra!