

FREE NABEEL RAJAB

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MCGOVERN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to call for the immediate and unconditional release of Nabeel Rajab, the prominent Bahraini human rights defender who remains in custody in Bahrain after being arrested a year ago. He is currently being detained in a hospital.

Nabeel is a leading human rights activist known across the region and beyond for this peaceful views. His work is internationally recognized, and he has won several major human rights awards.

Nabeel has been unjustly imprisoned several times since 2011, when he participated in protests against the Government of Bahrain and joined calls for democratic reform.

In April 2015, he was arrested following tweets criticizing the Saudi-led coalition airstrikes in Yemen and the treatment of detainees in Bahrain's Juw Prison. He was released after 3 months, but prosecutors ordered his rearrest in June of 2016. He is being held on numerous charges and is on trial in two separate cases for his human rights work. If convicted on all charges, he would face up to 18 years in jail.

So what kinds of charges are we talking about? He is accused of insulting national institutions, spreading tendentious rumors, and offending a foreign country. In other words, he is accused of exercising his right to freedom of speech.

Last December, a court ordered Nabeel's release on bail, but he was immediately rearrested for making "false or malicious" statements in TV interviews where he criticized Bahrain's refusal to allow journalists and human rights groups access to their country.

I have experienced that, by the way. In August of 2014, I was denied permission to visit Bahrain with Brian Dooley, who works with Human Rights First.

Since his arrest last year, Nabeel has undergone two operations, suffered heart palpitations, required emergency medical care, and developed other medical conditions. After the first operation, he was returned to prison with an open wound and had to be rushed back to the hospital 3 days later to treat the resulting infection.

His trials have been postponed more than a dozen times since his arrest last year, most recently yesterday. Nabeel has spent most of the last 10 months in solitary confinement after The New York Times published an op-ed by him last September. In that piece, Nabeel urged the Obama administration to use its leverage to resolve the conflict in Yemen instead of fanning the flames by supplying arms to the Saudi coalition.

A second New York Times piece by Nabeel appeared just last month on May 17, where he urged the Trump ad-

ministration to review its relations with authoritarian regimes like Bahrain.

I include in the RECORD these two articles so this House can see for itself the kinds of opinions that the Bahraini Government considers so dangerous.

[From the New York Times, Sept. 4, 2016]

LETTER FROM A BAHRAIN JAIL

(By Nabeel Rajab)

RIFFA, BAHRAIN.—I write this from a Bahraini jail cell where I have been detained, largely in isolation, since the beginning of summer. This is not new to me: I have been here before, from 2012 to 2014, in 2015, and now again, all because of my work as a human rights defender.

Nor am I alone: There are some 4,000 political prisoners in Bahrain, which has the highest prison population per capita in the Middle East. This is a country that has subjected its people to imprisonment, torture and even death for daring to desire democracy. My close colleague Abdulhadi al-Khawaja was tortured and sentenced to life in prison in 2011 for his human rights work.

No one has been properly held to account for systematic abuses that have affected thousands. In 2015, I was arrested on new charges of "insulting a statutory body" and "spreading rumors during a time of war" for posts on Twitter. The police held me from April to July last year. I was released only after the king of Bahrain issued a pardon in an earlier case, also related to views I had expressed.

Despite the pardon, the 2015 charges and a travel ban remained in place, and I was threatened with further action. The head of the cybercrimes unit at the Criminal Investigation Directorate in Bahrain summoned me and my family to a meeting, where—in front of my children—he warned me that if I didn't stop my advocacy work, I would face up to 15 years in prison.

That threat became reality when I was arrested in June. The warrant came from the same cybercrimes unit chief who threatened me last year, and I now face prosecution for my work exposing human rights abuses. The authorities even added a third charge of "insulting a neighboring country," meaning Saudi Arabia. They have also laid a new charge against me of spreading "false news," in relation to interviews I've given to the news media. It's quite the rap sheet.

My supposed "insult" to Saudi Arabia relates to tweets I posted calling for an end to the war in Yemen, a war escalated by the Saudi-led coalition to which Bahrain belongs and for which the United States provides support. The United States has authorized multibillion-dollar arms sales to the Saudis since the war began last year.

From the beginning, I was against the war. The civilian death toll was immediate and catastrophic, and I spoke out against the unfolding humanitarian crisis, calling for peace. Now, I am paying the price.

I met Secretary of State John Kerry on his visit to Bahrain earlier this year and was glad to talk with him about our difficult situation. Mr. Kerry criticized the boycott of the 2014 election by opposition parties, although the opposition's demand was simply for a constitutional monarchy in place of Bahrain's autocratic system. Since that election, the leader of the largest opposition group, the Wafaq National Islamic Society, was sentenced to nine years for "promoting violence," and the society was suspended and its assets frozen.

I would like to ask Mr. Kerry now: Is this the kind of ally America wants? The kind that punishes its people for thinking, that prevents its citizens from exercising their basic rights?

The government has gone after me not only for my comments on Yemen, but also for my domestic activism. One of my charges, "insulting a statutory body," concerns my work shedding light on the torture of hundreds of prisoners in Jaw Prison in March 2015. The State Department has highlighted the same problem, but last year lifted the arms embargo it had placed on Bahrain since the repressions that followed the 2011 Arab Spring protests, citing "meaningful progress on human rights reforms." Really?

After I met Mr. Kerry, I was interrogated at the Interior Ministry by the chief of the cybercrimes unit, the one who later ordered my arrest. He wanted to know everything about my conversation with the secretary of state. That official interrogated me again in April after I signed an open letter, with 25 other activists, calling on President Obama to discuss human rights and the plight of activists in the Middle East when he visited Saudi Arabia earlier this year.

The Bahraini government tried to pressure me into publicly disavowing the letter. I refused.

Recent American statements on Bahrain's human rights problems have been strong, and that is good. But unless the United States is willing to use its leverage, fine words have little effect. America's actions, on the other hand, have emboldened the government to detain me and other rights advocates: Its unconditional support for Saudi Arabia and its lifting of the arms ban on Bahrain have direct consequences for the activists struggling for dignity in these countries.

Instead of fanning the flames in Yemen by supplying arms to the Saudi coalition, Mr. Obama's administration should use its leverage to resolve the conflict. Working to secure the release of people who call for peace, and are trying to build democracy in the region, would serve that aim.

Update: After this Op-Ed essay was published, Nabeel Rajab was charged with publishing "false news and statements and malicious rumors that undermine the prestige of the kingdom."

Nabeel Rajab is the president of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights and an advisory committee member for Human Rights Watch's Middle East and North Africa Division.

[From the New York Times, May 17, 2017]

DON'T PROFIT FROM ABUSES BY BAHRAIN

(By Nabeel Rajab)

Yemen has entered its third year of war, and war crimes are being committed at an escalating rate. For Yemen's children, facing a man-made famine, this conflict between Houthi rebels and a coalition led by Saudi Arabia has begun a new phase of horrors.

Despite that, President Trump is planning to make Saudi Arabia the destination of his first state visit this week. Meanwhile, his administration already decided to lift all human rights restrictions on arms sales to my country, Bahrain, which is a partner in the Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen. This reckless pursuit of profit without any strings attached—including a lucrative deal for 19 F-16 fighter jets worth \$2.8 billion—will aid and abet the destruction of Yemen, intensifying the country's humanitarian disaster.

It fills me with shame that my country, Bahrain, is bombing Yemen, with United States support. And while the Saudi-led coalition continues its air assault on Yemen, Bahrain is also trying to crush civil society back home. This other, domestic campaign is aimed at people who, like me, cannot abide injustice and are willing to speak out.

Even so, we look to our friends in United States for strength and a united vision for a better future. Americans expect to have a government that is accountable, and that respects and protects its people's rights. That is our great ambition, also, in the Gulf.

We know we risk much in calling for this. Some of my fellow activists have been tortured, sentenced to life imprisonment, even killed. But I believe that respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms is the way to attain peace, stability and prosperity in any nation; I have devoted my life to that ideal.

Criticizing war crimes and torture on Twitter, speaking to journalists about our dire situation in Bahrain and the Gulf, and writing this newspaper: For these actions, I now face a total of 18 years' imprisonment. I've already spent more than 10 months in jail, mostly in solitary confinement. One of the charges against me derives from my taking a stand against the war in Yemen—not only because it causes misery and tragic loss of life, but also because it fosters violence and terrorism across the region.

Does the Trump administration know that former Bahraini soldiers have left the country to join the Islamic State? Does Washington know that Bahrain allows no Shiite citizens in its military even though Shiites are a majority of the population? Does the White House know that the Bahraini Army is a sectarian force that publishes books endorsing the murder of Shiites who do not "repent"?

When I criticized the fostering of extremism in the Bahraini Army, I was tossed into prison for six months. Bahrain's king, Hamad bin Isaal-Khalifa, has just approved a constitutional amendment allowing military courts to try civilians on unspecified charges of "terrorism." It is a law so vague and sweeping that my act of criticism could now result in a military prosecution.

This same Bahraini military, newly empowered, will soon be awarded its new American-made jets to fly over Yemen.

Bahraini citizens recognize that the United States is a superpower, but that status should not depend solely on its military capacity. American power should also be built on respect for justice, equality and human rights—the core principles upon which the United States was founded. It is these values that should dictate American foreign policy, not the profit margin of Lockheed Martin, maker of those F-16s destined for Bahrain.

The Trump administration must review its relations with authoritarian regimes like Bahrain's. These problematic alliances cost the United States far more in the long term than any gain it makes from arms deals. Human rights and justice should be a consistent priority in American foreign policy, not applied in one case, ignored in another.

All our destinies are tied together. What will happen to Bahrain if everyone who supports peace, democracy and the rule of law is in jail? To whom will Bahrain's disenfranchised youth turn to for support and guidance? These are the questions the Trump administration must ask itself before it sends my jailers another batch of fighter jets.

I am realistic about what to expect. After all, President Trump recently played host in Washington to Saudi Arabia's deputy crown prince and Egypt's president for life without bringing up human rights. But I have faith in the American people and civil society, as well as the lawmakers who continue to challenge these shortsighted, morally unsound policies.

Meanwhile, my trial date kept being moved. First, it was set for April 16. But this was the day of Bahrain's Formula One Grand Prix, the biggest sports event in the country,

so that was embarrassing for the government. Then, my trial was rescheduled for May 3. But that happened to be World Press Freedom Day, so the authorities pushed the date back again, to this week.

My detention has entered its 11th month. My health has declined. I'm recovering from a painful surgical procedure, yet the authorities have made every part of my detention as difficult as possible. My lawyers have been obstructed from providing me the best possible defense. But what I have endured is a small fraction of what the people of Yemen have suffered, largely because of the military intervention of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and their allies.

For my part, I will not stand idly by. I urge Americans not to do so, either. They must all call for an end to the Trump administration's unconditional support for my country's misdeeds at home and abroad.

Nabeel Rajab is the president of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights and an advisory committee member for Human Rights Watch's Middle East and North Africa Division.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Under Obama, the State Department repeatedly called on Bahrain to release Nabeel and drop the charges against him. It also tied the sale of F-16s to Bahrain to improvements in human rights.

In contrast, the new administration has lifted the hold on the F-16 sales and failed to call for Nabeel's release. When President Trump met with the King of Bahrain on May 21, he told him: We are going to have a very, very long-term relationship. I look forward to it very much—many of the same things common.

It was Trump's quote.

I am not sure what the President had in mind, but let's review what has happened in Bahrain this year. On January 5, the government restored arrest and investigation powers to its national security agency notorious for torturing detainees in 2011. This reverses one of the few security sector reforms outlined in the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry that the government carried out.

On January 15, Bahrain carried out its first execution since 2010, killing three men who were allegedly tortured into making false confessions.

On February 21, Bahrain's constitution was amended to allow military courts to try civilians.

On May 31, the government dissolved the secular opposition political party Wa'ad, and it was the last major opposition party still operating in the country after the al-Wefaq party was dissolved last summer.

On June 4, the government ordered al-Wasat, the country's only independent newspaper, to be suspended indefinitely.

Mr. Speaker, Bahrain is headed down an increasingly authoritarian path. It is closing off all avenues for peaceful dissent.

But the President of the United States does not get it. Could that have to do with the income he earned when the Bahraini Government held its National Day celebration at Trump International Hotel last December?

What I know is that appearances matter, and Bahrain is an increasingly

volatile dangerous place for our military personnel. We should not enable the Bahraini Government's repression. I call for the immediate and unconditional release of Nabeel Rajab and others jailed for their peaceful political views, and I urge the Trump administration to join me. I thank my colleagues for listening.

APPLAUDING THE WORK OF THE NATIONAL YOUNG FARMERS COALITION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. THOMPSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, last week, I met with members of the National Young Farmers Coalition. This nonprofit was founded just 8 years ago by three farmers in upstate New York. They gathered around a farmhouse table to talk about the challenges facing them and their peers: difficulty securing loans, access to affordable farmland, and student loan debt.

They decided that they and other young farmers needed to step up and fight for the future of farming as a united front. Across the country, other young farmers were also coming to the same realization, and the coalition was born.

It works in conjunction with farmers, consumers, organizations, and government to tackle the many challenges that young, independent, and sustainable farmers face in their first years of operating a farm business.

Young farmers include all people who are kicking off a career in agriculture. Typically, in their first 10 years of growing, this includes anyone from a first-year farm apprentice to someone pursuing a midlife career change to agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, rural America is struggling. But rural areas offer unique contributions to our Nation, often in the form of agriculture, raw materials, and naturally occurring commodities.

As more and more young people pursue fast-paced careers in cities and urban centers, the size and composition of populations in rural America is rapidly changing. American agriculture, in particular, is facing a crisis of attrition.

Two-thirds of our farmland is on the cusp of transition as farmers grow older and retire, and there are fewer young farmers positioned to manage this resource.

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Farmers over the age of 65 outnumber farmers under the age of 35 by a margin of 6 to 1. The number of farmers under the age of 35 grew by only 1 percent from 2007 to 2012. In order to fix this problem, we must help incentivize more young people to pursue careers in agriculture.

That is why, together with Representatives JOE COURTNEY of Connecticut and JOHN FASO of New York, I