



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on January 31, 2011

Obama Policy on Egypt: Back the Dictator

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told both [NBC's David Gregory](#) and [ABC's Christiane Amanpour](#) January 30 that the U.S. government would continue to work with the Mubarak regime and that his regime was "[demonstrating restraint](#)" — despite dozens of reports of Egyptian police and military brutality against demonstrators.

Clinton declined to ask the 30-year dictator to step down, [telling](#) Gregory on *Meet the Press* that "it's not a question of who retains power. That should not be the issue. It's how are we going to respond to the legitimate needs and grievances expressed by the Egyptian people and chart a new path?... I'm not going to go into hypotheticals and speculation other than to say that President Mubarak and his government have been an important partner to the United States."



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Clinton [explained](#) that she had some sympathy for the demonstrators but that U.S. policy was still rooted through contact with the Mubarak regime. "We continue to urge the Egyptian government, as the United States has for 30 years, to respond to the legitimate aspirations of the Egyptian people and begin to take concrete steps to implement democratic and economic reform.... We want to see a real democracy that reflects the vibrancy of Egyptian society. And we believe that President Mubarak, his government, civil society, political activists, need to be part of a national dialogue to bring that about."

Jennifer Rubin of the *Washington Post* [summarized](#) the statements by Clinton as among the "serial missteps of the Obama administration in wrapping its arms around Hosni Mubarak." Just days earlier, Vice President Joe [Biden had defended Mubarak](#) as a personal friend. Rubin concluded the obvious, that the Obama administration had taken the wrong side of history. "It's hard to conceive of a worse message to convey to the Egyptian people. It seems that the administration certainly is taking sides."

Astonishingly, Clinton [told](#) ABC's Christiane Amanpour on *This Week* that "Right now, we're monitoring the actions of the Egyptian military, and they are, as I'm sure your contacts are telling you, demonstrating restraint, working to try to differentiate between peaceful protesters, whom we all support, and potential looters and other criminal elements who are obviously a danger to the Egyptian people."

The government is showing "restraint"?

This is the same Clinton State Department whose embassy [acknowledged in secret cables](#) that police brutality was "routine and pervasive" under the Mubarak regime: "Torture and police brutality in Egypt are endemic and widespread. The police use brutal methods mostly against common criminals to



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extract confessions, but also against demonstrators, certain political prisoners and unfortunate bystanders.” This is precisely the picture of the Egyptian government that has emerged publicly over the past week. A series of highly publicized amateur videos that have escaped the drastic Mubarak [press blackout](#) have demonstrated that police and soldiers had been shooting demonstrators for [five days before her statement](#). More than [100 demonstrators have been killed](#) that the West knows about. Camera crews for Western television stations such as CNN and the [BBC](#) have been beaten up. And [tanks have fired](#) on demonstrators.

Clinton [acknowledged](#) in her *Meet the Press* interview that the keystone of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East was not to promote freedom in Egypt (or even U.S. national interests, which presumably are the same), but instead to buy off Egyptian leaders and make sure they do not invade Israel. “This is a government that made and kept a peace with Israel that was incredibly important, avoiding violence, turmoil, death in the region. But so much more has to be done, and that is what we are urging.”

The establishment wing of the Republican Party is also still throwing its support fully behind Mubarak. “I don’t have any criticism of President Obama or Secretary Clinton at this point,” Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) [told](#) Gregory on *Meet the Press* January 30. “We all know Egypt has been an extraordinarily important ally of ours. The Suez Canal has been kept open for commerce. They have worked with Israel to prevent, to a large extent, arms from going into Gaza because the Gaza-Egyptian border’s been a sensitive subject. And of course, we’re grateful for the 30-year peace agreement with Israel. So they are an indispensable ally.”

While the Tea Party movement has focused upon fiscal issues, last week Tea Party favorite — and the other Republican Senator from Kentucky — Rand Paul [called for cutting Egypt’s foreign aid off completely](#). Where the Tea Party movement stands on foreign policy has yet to be demonstrated. But a key part of the Tea Party movement, which grew out of the presidential campaign of Rand Paul’s father, Texas Republican Representative Ron Paul, has a strong non-interventionist streak. The elder Paul had [opposed](#) a measure continuing Egyptian foreign aid last year.

The elder Dr. Paul noted in a [January 10, 2008 presidential campaign debate](#) that the countries we “aid” would be better off without U.S. diplomatic meddling. “In many ways, we treat Israel as a stepchild. We don’t give them the responsibility that they deserve. We undermine their national sovereignty. We don’t let them design their own peace treaties with their neighbors. And then we turn around and say that when you want to defend your borders, you have to check it out with us. I think Israel would be a lot safer. I made the point earlier, we give three times as much money to the Arabs. Why do we arm their enemies? So if you support Israel you should be against all the weapons that go to the Arab nations. I just don’t see any purpose in not treating Israel in an adult fashion.”

Photo: Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak

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