



Written by [James Heiser](#) on February 9, 2012

Egyptian Government May Prosecute Foreign Activists

Egypt's purportedly 'transitional' government — upheld throughout the past year as the example of the "Arab Spring" movement that was destined to bring Western-style democracy to the Muslim world — is proving its inability to live up to the hype. While many warning signs have been in evidence since the emergence of the anti-Mubarak revolution — including a dramatic increase in anti-Christian persecution — many such omens have received little attention in the American media. Now, however, with the Obama administration threatening to cut the \$1.3 billion in military aid that the U.S. doles out annually to the Egyptian regime, that nation's "democratic" experiment is being examined once again.



The focus of ire from the Obama administration is the decision by Egyptian authorities to subject 40 foreign and Egyptian activists to criminal prosecution and bans on travel. The offense allegedly committed by the activists — including 19 Americans — is that they received foreign funding for their activities in Egypt. As explained in an article for Reuters (["NGO worker cases sent to Egypt court in funding row"](#)), the Egyptian regime is concerned that such activists for various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were receiving foreign financial support without the awareness of the government:

Egyptian officials say the crackdown is part of an investigation into foreign funding of NGOs. For the authorities, it is a matter of law; the non-governmental organizations broke it by receiving foreign funding without government approval.

Activists say the ruling military may be using the issue to whip up nationalist sentiment and distract attention from criticism the army is facing from protesters over its handling of the transition to civilian rule.

"The cases of 40 foreign and Egyptian suspects have been transferred to the Cairo criminal court related to foreign funding," a judicial source told Reuters. State news agency MENA also carried the report.

The controversial character of the activities of the NGO activists and the Egyptian crackdown is heightened by the fact that many (if not all) of the Americans who may be subject to criminal prosecution are allegedly affiliated with institutions associated with the two largest American political parties. As [Patrick Goodenough recently wrote for CNSNews.com](#):

Among the organizations being investigated and subjected to armed raids, confiscation of equipment and records and other harassment since late last year are the U.S. government-funded International Republican Institute (IRI) and National Democratic Institute (NDI), democracy-



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promoting groups loosely associated with America's two major political parties.

Both organizations deny any attempt to directly influence the political process in Egypt, and the IRI and NDI were quick to publicly disavow engaging in any actions in that country which could have legitimately drawn the wrath of the 'transitional' government. As reported by CNSNews, the IRI and NDI describe their institutional agenda in a nation half a world away from the political concerns of the parties with which they are associated as being rooted in a vague support for "democracy":

Both IRI and NDI have denied accusations of interfering in the Egyptian political process or encouraging Egyptians to protest.

"IRI does not provide monetary or material support to Egyptian political parties or civic groups, and the Institute's work is carried out in an open and transparent manner," the group says. "IRI's work with Egyptian civil society supports nonpartisan voter education and civic engagement with the goal of enhancing democratic participation and does not interfere with or influence the outcome of elections."

"At no time has NDI funded any political party or protest movement," says the NDI. "The Institute does not seek particular electoral outcomes; and does not align itself with any political party, ideology or candidate."

According to Reuters, the tensions between the Egyptian government and the NGOs is only made worse by mutual recriminations over the requirements for such organizations to be registered with the government. The government is charging them with failing to register, as required by law, while the NGOs insist they have tried to register for over a year and that authorities have "failed to respond to past requests to register." The IRI is quoted in the CNSNews report as claiming to have attempted registration since June 2006 — long before the fall of the Mubarak government.

The controversy over the activities of the NGOs is reaching a critical point because of conditions of U.S. law binding continued military aid to Egypt to progress in "Arab Spring" reforms. As reported by CNSNews, 2012 aid was specifically tied to a series of very specific actions:

U.S. legislation signed into law last December ties the provision of \$1.3 billion in military aid to Egypt in fiscal year 2012 to certification that the government in Cairo "is supporting the transition to civilian government including holding free and fair elections; implementing policies to protect freedom of expression, association, and religion, and due process of law."

The wording was inserted by Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), who chairs the Appropriations Committee's subcommittee on the State Department and Foreign Operations. Leahy said on the Senate floor Friday that "if the assault against international and Egyptian non-governmental organizations continues, several of the requirements for certification could not be met."

Egypt is among the many nations that have long been accustomed to substantial infusions of American "foreign aid." As noted by CNSNews, "Military aid to Egypt — amounting to \$1.3 billion a year since 1987 — has been secure for more than three decades, with Republican and Democratic administrations alike supportive of bolstering the Arab world's largest country following its decision to sign a peace agreement with Israel in 1979." And, of course, Israel has also been an ongoing recipient of quite substantial quantities of foreign aid; for example, Obama's 2010 budget included \$2.8 billion for Israel in "foreign military financing, military education, and peacekeeping operations."

The involvement of American political parties in foreign nations and the apparently *de facto* connection that has been made between the free course of action for those organizations (and others) to the



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commitment to substantial military aid is further evidence of the nation-building agenda that has become hardwired into American foreign policy. The folly of foreign aid and the ongoing compulsion to seek to influence the future of political institutions in nations where the political dynamics are poorly understood in the United States, are highlighted in the confused state of affairs in Egypt, and the reporting that has covered the aftermath of the “Arab Spring.” An ideological commitment to the spread of an American model of “democratic” governance rarely comprehends the significance of belief systems and national histories that are radically different from those of the American Republic.



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