

AMSPECBLOG

What about Cuba's Dissidents, Mr. President?

By Doug Bandow on 6.29.09 @ 9:20AM

I'm sympathetic with the Obama administration's caution in confronting events in Iran. It is not clear that full-throated U.S. government support for the demonstrators would do more to help than hurt human rights activists.

However, it seems always appropriate to highlight human rights abuses. Especially where activists, or their representatives--when, as in the case of Cuba, the activists are in jail--believe a meeting with or at least statement from the president would be helpful. In such a case it's hard to understand why he would refuse. My Cato Institute colleague Juan Carlos Hidalgo poses the question:

How come President Obama can find time to call and congratulate Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa on his reelection (someone who has said that he prefers "a thousand times" to be a friend of Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez than to be an ally of the United States) but can't find time to meet with, or at least issue a statement supporting, Cuban dissidents at the White House as his predecessors did?

It's a good question. The U.S. government cannot bring democracy to Cuba. But the Obama administration can help highlight oppression in Cuba. Doing so doesn't mean intervention in Cuba or even refusing to engage Havana. But doing so does mean helping ensure that heroic people fighting for freedom are not forgotten even as the Castro regime attempts to portray itself as victim rather than oppressor.

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