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US should learn to do nothing

Washington's shifting stance on the Arab upheavals only highlights its impotency

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The Obama administration wants Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad to go - finally. Washington thinks Yemen should replace its dictator, yet it supports the dictator who rules next-door Saudi Arabia. Do American officials really believe anyone pays the slightest attention to their ever-changing opinions about who should rule where?

The Obama administration's political pirouettes during the "Arab spring" have been breathtaking. As protests rose in Egypt, Washington supported Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak. As the regime tottered, the administration endorsed a phased transition. As Mubarak's end neared, US officials endorsed his ouster. None of these pious pronouncements had the slightest effect in Cairo.

Yet the administration played much the same game in Yemen. When protests first sprouted, the US government backed President Ali Abdullah Saleh. As opposition expanded, and Saleh's hold on power loosened, foreign policy aide John Brennan announced: "The United States believes that a transition in Yemen should begin immediately." Brennan met Saleh to urge him to resign. The latter paid Brennan no mind.

A similar soap opera is occurring in America's relations with Syria. When demonstrations began against the Assad family dictatorship, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton called Assad a "reformer". And, as the revolt spread, the US simply encouraged the Assad dictatorship to respond with dialogue instead of force. Washington refused to suggest that Assad step down.

But, after months of repression and bloodshed, President Barack Obama finally declared that "the time has come for President Assad to step aside". The next day, however, Assad was still in power.

Washington's options remain quite limited. Additional sanctions aren't likely to achieve regime change. And America doesn't need another

