



Libya And The Other Dictators

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[Youtube Video]

President Obama took it as self-evident that US and NATO intervention would help tip the balance in the Middle East toward reform. Benjamin Friedman's [not so sure](#):

Embroiling ourselves in Libya may do less to frighten other Middle East dictators than keeping our powder dry. Beyond tying up troops and public patience for war, the limited nature of our commitment—manifest in strict limits on the use of force and our stated desire draw back within days whether or not Qaddafi goes—might simply show dictators that they should hang tough, come what may. Whether or not he falls, if leaders like Bashar Assad fear his fate, they may simply heighten repression to prevent the sort of insurgency that brought western bombs to Libya.

Larison, unsurprisingly, [agrees](#):

[I]t occurs to me now that the Libyan intervention is something of a gift for other authoritarian governments. Even more than before, authoritarian governments are going to be able to portray dissenters in their countries as being in league with Western powers, and they will be able to point to Libya's fate as an example of what demands for political reform can cause. While the administration seems to be very keen to align itself with certain popular movements in the region, they are lending credibility to authoritarians' arguments that internal dissent is intended to weaken a country and that dissent invites outside attack.

Which means to say that outside intervention merely distorts the indigenous forces at large in the region, and may lead to the opposite of what is well intended. But America couldn't help itself, even under Obama. When you have that big a hammer ...

(Video: Syrian protesters tearing down the visage of Assad last weekend. Today Assad [dismissed](#) his entire cabinet, and tomorrow he's set to deliver "his first speech in two weeks of unprecedented dissent.")