

Enough of America's hypocritical foreign policy

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The U.S. backed military regime in Cairo is killing more supporters of ousted President Mohammed Morsi. Yet Washington continues to proclaim its inability to see a coup, so America's aid money still flows. The Obama administration is turning hypocrisy into an art form.

The great foreign policy illusion in Washington is that the U.S. government controls international events. Thus, the administration proclaims that it must continue to hand \$1.55 billion annually to the generals in Cairo to preserve its influence. Yet when did America ever exercise influence in Egypt?

Washington has provided almost \$75 billion in foreign "aid" over the years, most of it since the 1978 Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel. The peace has been kept, but Egypt always had the most to lose from another war with Israel.

Beyond that, Cairo has consistently ignored American advice. Presidents Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak made no pretense of promoting democracy or protecting human rights. When the revolution upended Mubarak, the administration successively backed the dictator, urged a negotiated departure, and supported his overthrow.

U.S. President Barack Obama unsuccessfully counseled President Morsi to be inclusive and military commander Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Sisi not to stage a coup. Since then Washington has urged the military ruler not to target the Muslim Brotherhood and risk driving it underground. He responded by shooting even more pro-Morsi demonstrators.

Yet, explain administration officials, if U.S. President Barack Obama acknowledged the obvious — that a military coup had overthrown an elected government — and applied the law, which requires the cutoff of U.S. aid, al-Sisi might ignore American advice. Oh, right.

It would have been better years ago had American officials shut up and done nothing. No money would have been wasted. Washington's impotence would not have been demonstrated. The U.S. would not be complicit in decades of military rule.

Alas, Egypt is not the first time when the U.S. government looks stupid while spending a lot of money. In fact, that is far more the rule than the exception for Washington.

For decades the U.S. government has given tens of billions of dollars a year in economic assistance. Recipients continued to wreck their economies by following dirigiste policies. Washington was the largest single contributor to the World Bank and other multilateral development banks, which routinely underwrote the most monstrous regimes, such as Nicolae Ceausescu's Romania and Mengistu Haile Mariam's Ethiopia.

A lot of foreign “aid” was walking around money for the secretary of state, as in Egypt. Hand the local despot a fistful of cash and he was supposed to do whatever you asked. However, governments in Washington’s pay quickly learned that U.S. officials hated to admit failure and end assistance. Thus, recipients simply ignored aid conditions.

During the Cold War, Washington had more than a few dictators on its payroll. U.S. officials cheerfully talked about the importance of democracy while ostentatiously backing autocracy.

The policy continues today, though the hypocrisy is not quite so flagrant or widespread. For instance, the Obama administration lauded the “Arab Spring” while supporting repression in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and now Egypt.

Washington’s plans for Iraq were even more fantastic. America was going to fight a war for democracy by installing as that nation’s president a corrupt Iraqi exile with no domestic support. The Sunni nation was expected to become a long-term U.S. client, providing military bases for use against next door Shiite Iran. War architects planned to impose American values and mores on another people in another land.

Much ink recently was spilled about preserving American credibility after Obama suggested that Syrian use of chemical weapons was a “red line” for intervention. Yet Washington has spent years insisting that it was absolutely unacceptable for North Korea and Iran to acquire nuclear weapons—even as their programs have, it seems, proceeded apace. U.S. diplomats circle the globe issuing instructions here, there and everywhere, only to be routinely ignored.

Washington’s delusions have proved particularly grand when addressing significant powers. American officials lecture China and Russia what to do regarding such nations as Iran, North Korea and Syria, without effect. Although the U.S. is a notorious fiscal wastrel, the Obama administration has publicly instructed the Europeans how to fix their economies.

Will U.S. officials never learn?

The answer apparently is no. Just look at Egypt, where American policy combines equal parts hypocrisy and futility.

The U.S. remains wealthy and powerful, but still cannot micro-manage the globe. Every new administration, irrespective of party, ignores this reality. The outcome is always the same: values sacrificed, money wasted, credibility lost, reputation damaged.

If President Obama wants to leave a positive foreign policy legacy, he should do and say less abroad.