

THE NATIONAL INTEREST

Stop It with the Kony 2012, Already

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I admire the efforts of journalists and activists to humanize foreign civil conflicts. That appreciation held me back from weighing in on the campaign by [Invisible Children](#) to publicize the atrocities meted out by Ugandan warlord [Joseph Kony](#) and his [Lord's Resistance Army \(LRA\)](#). But the phenomenon surrounding [Kony 2012 keeps gaining momentum](#), and I thought I would offer some brief comments.

It seems that by [deploying U.S. military advisers](#) last November to parts of Central Africa in search of [Kony and his thugs](#), the Obama administration supposedly demonstrated its selflessness in the promotion of human rights. However, the dispatching of advisers also sheds a harsh light on the stark opportunism of central planners in Washington who revile the LRA yet support Arab tyrannies guilty of human-rights abuses on a vastly larger scale.

I am often the [first to argue](#) that [diplomatic and economic engagement](#) with loathsome foreign powers is unavoidable in statecraft—but open engagement is one thing, [active endorsement is quite another](#). For a prime example, look no

further than Egypt, which arguably makes the violence the LRA unleashes pale in comparison.

While many in Washington may not like the Muslim Brotherhood or the Salafists who are coming to power in Cairo, we are taking it on the chin for backing Hosni Mubarak and his twenty-nine year authoritarian rule.

Understandably, Egyptians have not quickly forgotten that Washington backed—to the tune of more than \$60 billion—a harsh dictatorship that perpetuated its power through the denial of free speech, arbitrary imprisonment, routine torture, and other forms of savage repression. At Egyptian detention facilities, the torture methods used include water boarding, sexual humiliation, sleep deprivation, electric shock, and suspension from metal hooks.

Washington's concern for human rights was one it rarely applied to this brutal tyrant, and our use of his slaughterhouse contradicted the basic moral principles that we purport to impose on the rest of the world.

Additionally, Mubarak's authoritarianism—and America's patronage to it—served as a potent rallying cry for extremists determined to attack America, while Mubarak suppressed the ascendance of deeply conservative Islamist forces as well as moderate, reform-minded critics and proponents of liberal, secular thought. Why doesn't Washington end U.S. aid to Egypt? If the argument is that aid furthers Egyptian-Israeli peace, foreign-policy planners should keep in mind that Mubarak's secular government routinely stifled broader elements of lasting peace, including the full normalization of relations (i.e. expanded cultural relations, educational exchanges, tourism, etc). No wonder Israeli officials and analysts described their country's relations with Egypt as a "cold peace."

Not to be outdone, another police state that does horrible and unspeakable things to its people with our tacit acceptance is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, arguably the most oppressive regime in the region. The al-Saud royal family maintains a draconian judicial system that amputates the limbs of petty thieves. More abhorrent is that apostates and homosexuals can be sentenced to

execution, sometimes by beheading. In extreme cases, criminals are crucified in public.

For a glimpse into daily life, the Saudi regime's morality police (*mutawwa'in*) have been known to black out faces in advertisements and prohibit the sale of children's dolls for their representation of human beings; charge women with prostitution for socializing with men who are not their male relatives; and prowl the streets to ensure that businesses remain closed in observance of the five daily prayers. For those who retort that the Arab kingdom is a staunch ally in the global war on terror, consider that Saudi donors *still* constitute the most significant source of funding to terrorist groups worldwide.

In short, my aim is not to impugn those infatuated with the Kony 2012 phenomenon, as too few Americans care about human-rights conditions in foreign countries. But I must admit that I am completely baffled by U.S. officials who are appalled by Kony and the LRA and implicitly neglect the flagrant hypocrisy at the heart of American foreign policy. The United States is *not* obliged to protect human rights around the world. Nor is it obligated to provide unceasing support and political cover to police states that systematically repress their own people.