

The events in Egypt of late have captured the attention of the world, as many thousands of Egyptians take to the streets both in opposition to and in favor of the current regime. We watch from a distance hoping that events do not spiral further into violence, which will destroy lives and threaten the livelihoods of average Egyptians caught up in the political turmoil.

I hope that Egyptians are able to work toward a more free and just society. Unfortunately, much of the blame for the unrest in Egypt and the resulting instability in the region rests with US foreign policy over the past several decades. The US government has sent more than \$60 billion to the Egyptian regime since the Camp David Accords in 1978 to purchase stability, including more security for the state of Israel. We see now the folly of our interventionist foreign policy: not only has that stability fallen to pieces with the current unrest, but the years of propping up the corrupt regime in Egypt has led the people to increase their resentment of both America and Israel! We are both worse off for decades of intervention into Egypt's internal affairs. I wish I could say that we have learned our lesson and will no longer attempt to purchase – or rent – friends in the Middle East, but I am afraid that is being too optimistic. Already we see evidence that while the US historically propped up the Egyptian regime, we also provided assistance to groups opposed to the regime.

So we have lost the credibility to claim today that we support the self-determination of the Egyptian people. Our double dealing has not endeared us to Egyptians who now seek to reclaim their independence and national dignity.

“Diplomacy” via foreign aid transfer payments only makes us less safe at home and less trusted overseas. But the overriding reality is that we simply cannot afford to continue a policy of buying friends. We face an ongoing and potentially deepening recession at home-- so how can we justify to the unemployed and underemployed in the United States the incredible cost of maintaining a global empire? Moral arguments aside, we must stop sending hundreds of billions of dollars to foreign governments when our own economy is in shambles.

American media and talking heads repeatedly pose the same loaded questions: Should the administration encourage the Egyptian president to remain or to resign? Should the US ensure Mohamed ElBaradei or current vice president Omar Suleiman succeeds current president Mubarak? The best answer to these questions is that we should just do nothing, as Eisenhower did in 1956. We should leave Egypt for Egyptians to figure out. Some may claim that this is isolationism. Nothing could be further from the truth. We should enthusiastically engage in trade and allow travel between countries, but we should stay out of their internal affairs. We are in fact more isolated from Egypt now than ever, because the regime we propped up appears to be falling. We have isolated ourselves from the Egyptian people by propping up their government, as we isolate ourselves from Tunisians, Israelis, and other recipients of our foreign aid. Their resentment of our interventionist policies makes us less safe, because we lose our authority to conduct meaningful diplomacy when unpopular regimes fall overseas. We also radicalize those who resented our support for past regimes.

Let us hope for a more prosperous and peaceful era for the Egyptians, and let us learn the lessons of our thirty year Egyptian mistake.