

Fatal Arab Spring

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What does the deadly violence against U.S. officials in Libya and Egypt say about the Arab Spring? Is Mitt Romney ready to lead in this international atmosphere? Is our current president?

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The murderous anti-American violence in Libya and Egypt highlights a grim dilemma. Even U.S. officials who believe that promoting democracy and human rights serves U.S. interests need to acknowledge that popular revolutions against unattractive authoritarians can make matters worse. In other words, sometimes our policy choices are between bad and worse. Hatred of tyranny does not, alas, equate to love of liberty. One doesn't have to feel nostalgia for Hosni Mubarak's dictatorship to recognize that the new Islamist government in Egypt seems intent on doing far more harm to human rights and U.S. interests than Mubarak ever did.

The challenge for U.S. officials is to maximize the chances that we can influence events for the good. By cutting pro-democracy funding in the pre-upheaval period and generally shunning a leadership role, the Obama administration has not met this challenge. This has been true in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Iran, and elsewhere.

President Obama is more interested in renouncing American assertiveness and establishing the paramountcy of the United Nations Security Council than he is in advancing the particular interests of the United States.

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