

Wall Street Journal flaunts its support for dictatorship

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The ongoing tumultuous events in the Middle East and North Africa have further exposed the claim that the US government has an interest in democracy anywhere in the world. Outraged populations have risen up against one brutal regime after another that has been armed, financed and maintained by Washington—Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain and beyond.

The goal of American foreign policy, more clearly revealed than ever, is to defend the wealth and strategic interests of the US corporate-financial oligarchy.

This has not been lost on great numbers of people, in the US and elsewhere. The laying bare of the real nature of American operations makes the political and media establishment anxious. For various historical reasons, US imperialism has previously dressed up its predatory operations in the guise of bringing “freedom and democracy” to various peoples. As Trotsky remarked derisively in 1924, “America is always liberating somebody, that’s her profession.” (After all, “Operation Iraqi Freedom” and “Operation Enduring Freedom” are the official names used by the US government for its occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, respectively.)

Only someone not right in the head, however, could pretend that supporting dictators like a Ben Ali (Tunisia), a Mubarak (Egypt), or a Saleh (Yemen) is a liberating act. These figures have presided for decades over regimes that routinely arrest, sadistically abuse and murder political opponents, suppress workers in the interest of foreign and domestic corporations, and generally terrorize their populations, while engorging themselves, their families and cronies with riches.

The editors of Rupert Murdoch’s *Wall Street Journal* have therefore felt it necessary to come to the defense of the dictatorships propped up by Washington. In an

editorial February 16 (“Egypt and Iran”), the *Journal* uses the occasion of police repression by the Iranian regime to make the case for US-backed dictators.

After taking note of the Green protests in Iran on February 14, the editorial asserts that “it’s important to understand why revolution will be harder [in Iran] than in Egypt and Tunisia.” The editors go on to argue that although conditions in Iran, Egypt and numerous other countries are generally similar, Iran’s leaders are “more ruthless.” On the other hand, according to the *Journal*, “Hosni Mubarak and Egypt’s military, dependent on US aid and support, were susceptible to outside pressure to shun violence.”

This is a grotesque lie. The *Journal* chooses to forget that Mubarak and Egypt’s military lived *by and through violence*, with the full backing of “the West,” for three decades. Far from pressuring the Egyptian government to “shun violence,” Washington enlisted Egyptian officials to torture US-held prisoners as part of Washington’s rendition program in the “war on terror.”

We will spare the reader descriptions of the barbaric methods of torture employed by the Egyptian state against its real and imagined enemies. Its prisons, by all accounts, rang with screams. The regime killed thousands and imprisoned tens of thousands, at a conservative estimate.

In the last days of Mubarak’s rule alone, the military “secretly detained hundreds and possibly thousands of suspected government opponents ... and at least some of these detainees have been tortured,” according to human rights activists cited by the *Guardian* on February 9.

Nonetheless, the *Journal* continues shamelessly, “To put it another way, pro-American dictatorships have more moral scruples.”

The implicit claim that the Egyptian army is refraining from a crackdown on popular protests and strikes due to its “moral scruples” is absurd. If it has so far abstained from drowning popular resistance in blood, it is because it faces a millions-strong mass movement and dares not pursue such a policy.

The generals in Cairo and their overlords in Washington fear that, with such an assault, they might provoke a revolutionary response. The military is therefore biding its time, preparing its forces, hoping that official and petty-bourgeois “opposition” forces will demobilize popular protests and allow them to re-establish control of the situation.

The timing of the *Journal*’s article was unfortunate, however. Within 24 hours of the editorial’s appearance, one of those “scrupulous,” pro-American dictatorships in Bahrain, an island nation whose people lives in the shadow of the US Navy’s Fifth Fleet, launched a lethal assault on protesters gathered in the capital city’s central square.

Officially, five were killed, although 60 are missing, and some 250 people injured, by batons, rubber bullets and pellets fired from shotguns. The security forces attacked sleeping men, women and children without mercy, beating some of them to death. The savagery of the attack outraged the population, prompting huge funeral processions on Friday. Again, crowds were fired on and many wounded, by the American-trained army this time.

Bahrain is considered critical by the US for a number of geopolitical reasons, and it appears that even the crocodile tears shed by Barack Obama over repression in Egypt will not be spilled in this case. As one commentator noted, “As far as Washington is concerned, this small Persian Gulf kingdom may be where support for Middle East democracy dies.”

In any event, the US government over the decades has cooperated with and backed the most horrific regimes on earth, from Franco’s Spain and apartheid South Africa, and governments run by butchers in military uniform in Central and South America, to semi-feudal monarchies in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, and the rule of mass murderers in Indonesia. American foreign policy has, in fact, sailed upon an ocean of blood and human misery.

The *Journal* editorial’s hostile comments about the Iranian regime are not driven by any affection for

democracy. The editors are sympathetic to Iran’s Green Movement because the latter is a right-wing trend, with strongest support in middle-class layers, which criticizes the Ahmadinejad government for not going far enough along the lines of International Monetary Fund-inspired “free market reforms.” A Mousavi-Karroubi regime in Iran would still be a dictatorship, but it would be precisely a “pro-American” dictatorship.

If, however, one were to set aside the *Journal*’s self-serving claims about Iran, what is one to make of the fact that a leading American publication openly makes the case for supporting dictatorship?

In this the *Journal* speaks, although perhaps more brazenly and openly than some, for the American ruling elite as a whole. The editors of the *New York Times* would not disagree, although they might approach the matter somewhat more gingerly ... and underhandedly. The Obama administration proceeds in a similar fashion, cynically registering its “alarm” and “deep concern” about each successive atrocity carried out by its dictatorial client states.

The chatter of the *Journal*’s editors about “moral scruples” is just that. The *Wall Street Journal* appraises a given foreign government according to the most cynical *Realpolitik*: does it assist or stand in the way of American global interests? After the fact, the newspaper finds virtues and “moral scruples” in those governments that do—or rather, their supposed virtue lies precisely in their subservience to US strategic aims.



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