

HILLARY CAN'T DECIDE WHETHER TO IMPOSE DEMOCRACY OR NOT

On Saturday, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told attendees at a security conference that our torturer, Egyptian Vice President Omar Suleiman, should manage the transition to democracy in Egypt.

She backed off that stance yesterday.

CBS White House Correspondent Mark Knoller:

On flight home from Germany, Secy of State Clinton says "we cannot and would not try to dictate any outcome" in Egypt.

Clinton says "I am no expert on the Egyptian constitution," but if Mubarak resigns, presidential elections would have to be held in 60 days.

State Department Spokesperson PJ Crowley:

#SecClinton today: The transition to #democracy (in #Egypt and elsewhere) will only work if it is deliberate, inclusive and transparent.

*Secretary #Clinton today:
There needs to be an orderly,
expeditious transition. The
people of #Egypt will be the
arbiters of this process.*

Meanwhile, Robert Fisk lays out in detail the same thing I raised to explain Frank Wisner's apparent flip-flop on whether Mubarak should go or not. Here's what I said:

Wisner is a lobbyist for Patton Boggs, representing the Government of Egypt.

PJ [Crowley] would have been better

served to say something like, “having utterly failed in his mission for his country, Wisner has gone back to his day job pushing whatever policy his clients think, regardless of its benefit to America.”

Here’s Fisk’s explanation.

The US State Department and Mr Wisner himself have now both claimed that his remarks were made in a “personal capacity”. But there is nothing “personal” about Mr Wisner’s connections with the litigation firm Patton Boggs, which openly boasts that it advises “the Egyptian military, the Egyptian Economic Development Agency, and has handled arbitrations and litigation on the [Mubarak] government’s behalf in Europe and the US”. Oddly, not a single journalist raised this extraordinary connection with US government officials – nor the blatant conflict of interest it appears to represent.

[snip]

Patton Boggs states that its attorneys “represent some of the leading Egyptian commercial families and their companies” and “have been involved in oil and gas and telecommunications infrastructure projects on their behalf”. One of its partners served as chairman of the US-Egyptian Chamber of Commerce promoting foreign investment in the Egyptian economy. The company has also managed contractor disputes in military-sales agreements arising under the US Foreign Military Sales Act. Washington gives around \$1.3bn (£800m) a year to the Egyptian military.

[snip]

Nicholas Noe, an American political researcher now based in Beirut, has

spent weeks investigating Mr Wisner's links to Patton Boggs. Mr Noe is also a former researcher for Hillary Clinton and questions the implications of his discoveries.

"The key problem with Wisner being sent to Cairo at the behest of Hillary," he says, "is the conflict-of-interest aspect... More than this, the idea that the US is now subcontracting or 'privatising' crisis management is another problem. Do the US lack diplomats?"

"Even in past examples where presidents have sent someone 'respected' or 'close' to a foreign leader in order to lubricate an exit," Mr Noe adds, "the envoys in question were not actually paid by the leader they were supposed to squeeze out!"

By and large, the Obama Administration response to this admittedly difficult challenge has been not-horrible. But both Wisner's selection as envoy (which would have been horrible even without the Patton Boggs connection, given his ties to his daddy's coup-happy CIA, Enron, and AIG) and Hillary's outspoken support for Omar Suleiman were unforced errors.