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Gadhafi's Death Prompts Pro-Arab Spring Lie From Obama

By John Glaser

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Remarking on Muammar Gadhafi's death on Thursday, President Barack Obama [hailed it as a warning to Middle Eastern dictatorships "the rule of an iron fist inevitably comes to an end."](#) But he obscured his administration's own commitment to authoritarianism in the region.

Without mentioning either, his warning is thought to have been directed at Syria's Bashar al-Assad and Yemen's Ali Abdullah Saleh, two autocrats who have been brutally cracking down on peaceful antigovernment protests. "Across the Arab world," he said, "citizens have stood up to claim their rights. Youth are delivering a powerful rebuke to dictatorship, and those leaders that try to deny their dignity will not succeed."

In Yemen though, Washington's demonstrated preference has been for Saleh since the beginning. Obama [continued](#) his predecessor's ramped up support of the dictator, [aiding the regime with money and weapons](#) while he implemented [an intensified covert war in Yemen](#), using unmanned drone attacks as their primary weapon.

Blatant, horrendous atrocities against peaceful Yemeni protesters pushed the administration to call for Saleh to step down, [adopting a Gulf state plan](#) to give him immunity [for his war crimes](#) and form an opposition cabinet. Those calls were [tempered](#) ever since the successful [assassination of US citizen Anwar al Awlaki](#) by US-operated Predator drones. Obama administration officials [heaped praise on the Yemeni government immediately following the Awlaki killing](#), knowing full well that a democratic change in Yemen's leadership is likely to put

checks on US domination of the Gulf country and restrictions on breaches of sovereignty like drone attacks.

Yemen is still set to receive [\\$120.2 million in US aid](#) in fiscal year 2012, the largest slice of which is in security and military assistance.

In Bahrain, Obama has been similarly on the side of the sort of “iron fist” he railed against on Thursday. In June, the Bahraini Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa [visited the White House](#) to have Obama “reaffirm the strong US commitment to Bahrain,” even as the regime had been [gunning down unarmed activists](#) with live ammunition, unleashing “[live rounds, metallic pellets, rubber bullets, and teargas](#)” at protestors for months, and [violently suppressing pro-democracy demonstrations at every turn](#).

The Bahrain dictatorship has long been an ally of Washington. The Pentagon [recently sent](#) dozens of American tanks, armored personnel carriers, helicopter gunships, thousands of .38 caliber pistols and millions of rounds of ammunition, from .50 caliber rounds used in sniper rifles and machine guns to bullets for handguns.

International pressure and criticism of Obama’s partnership in suppressing democracy in Bahrain forced them this week to [place a hold on an additional order of \\$53 million in arms and military equipment](#). Bahrain, too, is [set to receive tens of millions of dollars in US aid and security assistance next year](#).

In Egypt, the Obama administration actively supported the long-time US ally and barbaric dictator Hosni Mubarak until the very end of his rule, which was brought about by embattled Egyptian protesters despite US backing of their dictator. Since Mubarak’s ouster, the Obama administration has been working hard to [solidify the autocratic power structure and prevent authentic democracy](#).

The Obama administration’s support for the government of Iraq is also difficult to square with his professions of commitment to democracy. The leader of the puppet government we’ve set up there, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has [circumvented Parliament](#), consolidated [illegitimate power](#) in a [long trend of quasi-dictatorial behavior, harshly cracked down](#) on peaceful activism, [harassed and even attacked journalists](#) that were critical of his regime, and has been accused of [torturing prisoners](#) in secret Iraqi jails.

In a diplomatic cable released by WikiLeaks, US envoy [Ryan Crocker noted in 2009 that Maliki’s turn towards more centralized rule is “in US interest.”](#) A deal is being finalized to send Iraq [\\$82 million worth of military arms and equipment](#) and it is set to [receive \\$2.3 billion in US aid for 2012](#).

In Libya, Obama [circumvented legal obligations](#) to get Congressional approval for war in order to oust Gadhafi, who was indeed a dictator. But the US [had supported Gadhafi](#) up until the beginning of this year with both [economic and military aid](#). In his place, Obama has helped put a questionable guild of tribal factions in power, whose commitment to democracy is nebulous at best and who [committed serious crimes](#) throughout their NATO-supported coup.

Syria's Bashar al' Assad, committing serious atrocities on activists for months, is perhaps the only dictatorship facing Arab Spring protests that Obama has not had a hand in supporting. Obama's rhetorical pledges to support pro-democracy protests and be on the side of the people instead of the dictators are not enough to eclipse his administration's enthusiastic commitment to tyranny throughout the region.