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**THE WALL STREET JOURNAL**

WSJ.com

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OPINION | AUGUST 17, 2009, 7:21 P.M. ET

## The President and The Arab Status Quo

*It's time for Obama to turn his back on tyrants.*

By SAAD EDDIN IBRAHIM

As a candidate, Barack Obama pledged not to support dictators friendly to the United States. Yet despite this promise, President Obama welcomes Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to the White House this week.

This unusual goodwill—the president also visited Mr. Mubarak in Cairo on June 4—is sending mixed messages to all those Americans who worked to elect Mr. Obama as a champion of change. And it is disappointing to those in Egypt, Africa and the Arab world who hailed his historic victory as the first African-American president.

Mr. Mubarak, 82 years old, has been ruling Egypt for 28 years. He's received more than \$50 billion in outright U.S. aid but has failed to deliver anything to his own people. He hasn't contributed an iota to regional peace beyond what his predecessor, the late Anwar Sadat, had already accomplished at Camp David 32 years ago.

Mr. Obama only has to read the latest Human Development Report from the United Nations Development Program to note the steady drop in Egypt's regional and global ranking. Likewise, the annual reports from Amnesty International, Human Rights First, Human Rights Watch and Freedom House all focus on the lack of democratic governance and the massive violations of human rights under Mr. Mubarak—including torture and coerced disappearances.

There has also been an exponential rise in sectarian violence against the Christian Copts. Since Mr. Obama's celebrated speech at Cairo University two months ago, there have been more than 40 attacks.

Yet Mr. Mubarak has continued to get a free pass from the U.S. and has even received outright praise from senior members of the Obama administration. The tiny fraction of U.S. aid that is earmarked for Egypt's civil society is subject to the Mubarak regime's veto.

Egypt could be a pivotal player in regional politics. Instead, Mr. Mubarak has squandered his country's potential in exchange for control over the Egyptian people. Schemes to pass down power to his son, Gamal, are now out in the open.

The most disheartening part in all of this is that Washington under President Obama is conducting old-style foreign policy with Arab tyrants from Libya's Moammar Gadhafi to Syria's Bashar Assad. Except for his optimistic rhetoric, Mr. Obama is increasingly perceived by Arabs and Muslims as yet another American president interested in maintaining the status quo.

After his eloquent and moving talk in Cairo, many wonder whether Mr. Obama will walk the walk as forcefully as he talks the talk. He has the chance to do so today at the White House

Those in the Middle East who once lamented President George W. Bush's hasty retreat from his 2004-06 Freedom Agenda are now lamenting Mr. Obama's two month old promise to support democracy and rule of law.

**Mr. Ibrahim, an Egyptian academic, was incarcerated by the Mubarak regime from 2000 to 2003.**

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