

RELEASE IN PART  
B6

**From:** H <hrod17@clintonemail.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, February 11, 2011 12:08 PM  
**To:** 'monica.hanley' [redacted]  
**Subject:** Fw: H: in case they haven't shown you this article by Rothkopf today. Sid

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Pls print.

----- Original Message -----

**From:** sbwhoeop [redacted]  
**To:** H  
**Sent:** Fri Feb 11 10:09:26 2011  
**Subject:** H: in case they haven't shown you this article by Rothkopf today. Sid

[http://rothkopf.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/02/11/is\\_obama\\_slipping\\_on\\_egypt](http://rothkopf.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/02/11/is_obama_slipping_on_egypt)

Is Obama slipping on Egypt? <[http://rothkopf.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/02/11/is\\_obama\\_slipping\\_on\\_egypt](http://rothkopf.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/02/11/is_obama_slipping_on_egypt)>

Posted By David Rothkopf <<http://rothkopf.foreignpolicy.com/blog/48>>  
 <[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/images/091022\\_meta\\_block.gif](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/images/091022_meta_block.gif)> Friday, February 11, 2011 - 9:44 AM  
 <[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/images/091022\\_meta\\_block.gif](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/images/091022_meta_block.gif)>

It is tempting to write off the Obama administration's recent missteps on Egypt as classic symptoms of NPD: narcissistic policy disorder. This is a disease, common in American presidents, in which they feel that every event is about them, demands their response, always offers a starring role for them.

But the mistakes Thursday were of a more serious variety. The worst of them was CIA Director Leon Panetta's absolutely inexcusable and shockingly atypical decision to announce to the Congress that in his view Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak would likely be out of office by midnight. Obviously, the agency was feeling the heat because it had failed to call the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere in the one region of the world to which the most agency assets are (likely) directed. So it made the classic error of overcompensating for the past failure to predict event... by predicting one that didn't actually happen.

This was a lose-lose idea. Had Panetta been right, how would it have looked if the CIA had actually been the first entity to announce Mubarak's departure? Might it have fueled perceptions that the U.S. was pulling the strings behind the scenes in Cairo, that Suleiman was the CIA's guy? (Not exactly a big stretch to begin with.) Who thought it was appropriate that the U.S. ought to get in front of Egypt's story?

The answer, one has to assume, is someone in the White House. It is hard to imagine that on this issue this administration would let its CIA Director make public remarks to the Congress without vetting them beforehand. Which brings us to the other two major statements made by the White House on Thursday.

The first of these involved President Obama's rather breathless assertion that we were watching history unfold in Egypt and also implying that soon Mubarak would be stepping down. Once again, who was it that suggested to the President that it was in his interest...or America's...for him to be the warm-up act for the Egyptian President's expected big exit. It was the kind of decision that was a sure sign that the President was spending more time listening to political and press advisors than he was seasoned foreign policy professionals. It is understandable how a flack might suggest it was important to take advantage of the high press interest in the story and to "stay ahead of it" (thus avoiding the kind of criticism associated with the lagging responses to the Iranian and Tunisian uprisings). The problem of course is that revolutions don't play according to scripts and are notorious for generating rumors. And the consequence was that the President looked in the first instance like he was grandstanding and then, after Mubarak's disappointing and infuriating remarks, he just looked foolish.

The second statement from the White House, which came after Mubarak's remarks, demanded further explanation as to what the fossilized, politically tone deaf Egyptian strongman meant. These seemed impotent and petulant and also had the effect of further entrenching the White House in opposition to Mubarak, Suleiman and a regime that might well be around for some time. It even included a demand: "The Egyptian government must put forward a credible, concrete and unequivocal path toward genuine democracy, and they have not yet seized that opportunity." The ungrammatical nature of the sentence aside, it also had the effect of giving some credence to what was perhaps Mubarak's least credible statement, the one in which he asserted he would not be pressured by foreign diktats. That assertion was redolent with irony thanks to the fact that what Mubarak really meant was that he would not be pressured by the legitimate demands of his own people...at least it was until the White House served up a foreign diktat as if they were selling them at a drive through window on West Executive Drive (the little street on the White House grounds where senior staffers get to park.) The President and his team started out managing this crisis fairly well. But the longer it goes on, the more ragged their handling of it has seemed (viz. the embarrassing back and forth with Frank Wisner last weekend or the profusion of slightly overheated statements on the subject from soon-to-be-departing Press Secretary Robert Gibbs). Stories have also started to emerge in the press about internal divisions on the stance the administration should take (see the Los Angeles Times piece entitled "Obama advisors split on when and how Mubarak should go" which explains why the administration is producing mixed messages.) If the awkwardness associated with Thursday's statement doesn't produce a little introspection and a more modulated response going forward, then the recognition that these are actually very early days in this process should. While 17 days of upheaval may seem like an eternity to 24 hour news producers who have to fill air time, however long this uprising might last, it is important to remember that any transition to a new government will take time and it will be years before it is clear what the nature of the changes that transition produces will be. Governments may come and go during that period and their attitudes toward America or issues in which we have an interest may ebb and flow.

If we try and stay "out in front" of such a story we will be spun around so many times we will be able to replace the Secretary of State with a weather vane. The hard work of U.S. diplomacy on this issue must take place behind the scenes and it must involve a kind of patience and perspective the White House seems to have lost touch with in the past few days.

That's not to say that the U.S. should not express solidarity with the people of Egypt or defend their legitimate rights. We should. And behind the scenes it is my personal view that we should work hard to ensure that Mubarak, Suleiman and their odious cronies both go and go soon. And then, with balance and perspective restored, someone should go into the office of Obama's smart, talented incoming press secretary Jay Carney and put up a sign that says "Do Not Feed the News Cycle"...because, at least on foreign policy stories like this one, it is an insatiable beast that will eat an administration and its policies alive if they are not careful.