

Praying for Egypt isn't enough

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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It always feels a bit odd to me to pray for justice in the world--better to *work* for justice and to pray for the courage and wherewithal to keep at it. Of course, I know that my power to effect change is relatively small, and I believe that God's is infinite. So I pray for justice, even though mere words seem too easy even as I'm saying them.

But

it's odder still to hear such a prayer from the most powerful person in the world. Yesterday at the National Prayer Breakfast (an event of dubious value, but that's [another post](#)), President Obama [offered this](#):

We

pray that the violence in Egypt will end, and that the rights and aspirations of the Egyptian people will be realized, and that a better day will dawn over Egypt and throughout the world.

Hard to argue with that. But a prayer? Obama is singularly positioned to actually *do* something about this, by increasing pressure on Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak to [step down immediately](#)--under threat of cutting the [rather massive military aid](#) the U.S. sends Egypt's way.

If

Obama does end up taking a harder line on Mubarak, the political pressure he'll be responding to won't necessarily be from his own constituents. As Adam Serwer [argues](#), it'll be because it's clear that Mubarak's likely to lose power anyway. Our foreign policy is idealistic in rhetoric but pragmatic in fact, and it's always strategic to pick a winner. And, Serwer adds, while the Obama administration can tell Mubarak to respect human rights,

It's

not hard to understand why neither Mubarak nor the leadership of Egyptian security forces would take this too seriously. For years, the United States has implicitly asked Egypt to violate human-rights laws on our behalf. Why would they take U.S. calls to respect them seriously now?

Mubarak confidant and now vice president Omar Suleiman is [well-connected in Washington](#), and the Obama administration's private discussions with Mubarak have [reportedly included](#)

the idea of a transitional government with Suleiman at the helm.

Suleiman's U.S. connections, however, include his leading role in the CIA's rendition program: when we needed to outsource torture, he was our point person in Egypt.

[In one case](#),

a suspected Al Qaeda operative confessed, allegedly while being tortured under Suleiman's direct supervision. He was later imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay, and his earlier confession was used as evidence in his trial there. Guantanamo, of course, [remains open for business](#).

Shamefully,

the U.S. has a stake in Mubarak's thuggish regime. It will take more than prayerful words for us to help the people of Egypt.

Among

other things, it's past time we got our own house in order when it comes to human rights. Next month, Duke Divinity School is hosting a gathering on faith-based antitorture advocacy. The aim is a "moral consensus against torture," and the conference [web page](#) states the case concisely:

Torture

is never justified; it dehumanizes both victim and perpetrator; and it ultimately renders the nation that practices it morally damaged, less secure, and less human than before.

Our moral credibility in the world depends on us becoming more human again.