

# MEDDLING

As violence intensifies in Iran and Neocons increasingly demagogue in DC, I wanted to say a few words about meddling.

The debate, right now, is being framed on whether to meddle or not to meddle.

In the strongest message yet from the U.S. government, the House voted 405-1 Friday to condemn Tehran's crackdown on demonstrators and the government's interference with Internet and cell phone communications.

The resolution was initiated by Republicans as a veiled criticism of President Barack Obama, who has been reluctant to criticize Tehran's handling of disputed elections that left hard-liner President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in power.

Rep. Mike Pence, who co-sponsored the resolution, said he disagrees with the administration that it must not meddle in Iran's affairs.

"When Ronald Reagan went before the Brandenburg Gate, he did not say Mr. (Mikhail) Gorbachev, that wall is none of our business," said Pence, R-Ind., of President Reagan's famous exhortation to the Soviet leader to "tear down that wall."

What few want to admit openly is that we have already meddled.

On top of our long history of meddling in Iran, we have, in the last three years been intentionally meddling, investing in democracy promotion and covert ops to bring about precisely what we're seeing today. In 2006, we did this through the State Department.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told

Congress this week that the administration is seeking \$75 million in emergency funding to immediately begin ratcheting up support for pro-democracy forces inside Iran. Currently, \$10 million was budgeted for such efforts, and little of that money has been spent.

[snip]

The money will go toward boosting broadcasts in Farsi to Iran, support for opposition groups, and student exchanges.

After some pushback from Iranian opposition groups the figure was multiplied and given to the CIA.

Late last year, Congress agreed to a request from President Bush to fund a major escalation of covert operations against Iran, according to current and former military, intelligence, and congressional sources. These operations, for which the President sought up to four hundred million dollars, were described in a Presidential Finding signed by Bush, and are designed to destabilize the country's religious leadership. The covert activities involve support of the minority Ahwazi Arab and Baluchi groups and other dissident organizations.

[snip]

"The Finding was focussed on undermining Iran's nuclear ambitions and trying to undermine the government through regime change," a person familiar with its contents said, and involved "working with opposition groups and passing money."

Though some of this money undoubtedly funded special forces operations, much of this 475

million dollars presumably went into the kind of political opposition we see in the streets of Iran right now.

And I've got seriously mixed feelings about that. Support for opposition groups and soft power is one of the ways we won the Cold War. I'd much rather fund opposition groups than go to war (we ought to, of course, consider choice "C," none of the above). But would it have been necessary if we hadn't overthrown Mossadeq in 1953, if we haven't been playing this losing chess game for a half century?

In any case, as someone who studied the way Czech dissidents used Radio Free Europe to broadcast their own writings back into their country leading up to 1989, I don't know that US support diminishes the authenticity of opposition action.

That said, this whole debate about meddling, right now, is about war, not about a peaceable show of democracy. Pence and Cantor and McCain and Lieberman—and people like Michael Ledeen, which ought to raise hackles right away—are trying to push Obama to say something that will imply a promise to those protesting in Iran that if things get violent (which is already happening and was predictable even ignoring the possibility that CIA is funding some of this), we'll come in to break up the violence. As Hisham Melhem pointed out on Diane Rehm on Friday (just after 40:00, but all guests discuss this in a useful way from 33:30 to 42:00), we have promised democracy activists in Iraq and Hungary in the past, yet not delivered.

You don't call on people to rise up and do nothing when they do that, there is a moral responsibility.

[snip]

He cannot and should not go beyond that, especially when he cannot delivery.

The Neocons pushing for some stronger words, I

think, don't give a damn whether Obama can deliver or not. They'd like to put him in a position where he is forced to deliver. And that's why their calls for support now are perfectly consistent with their recent calls to bomb Iran. Charitably, both positions are about regime change no matter what, and honestly, both positions are likely about war in Iran.