OUR INDUSTRIAL POLICY NEEDS TO DO MORE THAN ARM DICTATORS

Spencer has a useful catalog of all the war toys Egypt buys with our military aid.

> Whatever Egypt's military does next, chances are they'll do it with American weapons.Al-Jazeera showed M1A1 Abrams tanks carrying Egyptian soldiers through Cairo in what its correspondents called "a show of force." Those iconic American tanks have been co-produced in Egypt since 1988; the Egyptians have about 1000 of them. As was endlessly re-tweeted, canisters containing tear gas that the police used on protesters — before the hated police melted away over the weekend — had "Made in America" stamped on them. (Our colleagues at Ars Technica take a look at what's inside the Pennsylvania-manufactured tear gas.)
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> On Sunday, fighter jets flew low over a Cairo crowd, turning on their afterburners to deafen their audience. Most likely they were part of Egypt's fleet of 220 F-16s.
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> Most of the $1.3 billion that the U.S. annually provides to Egypt in military aid goes for weaponry to defend Egypt against foreign assault, like Patriot air-defense missiles, Multiple Launch Rocket System rocket pods and TOW anti-armor missiles. That's not particularly relevant for crowd control against protesters.

He's right: the spectacular images of the Egyptian military showing its presence amid protesters serves to highlight the war toys at the heart of our influence with the Egyptian

military, and therefore at the heart of our relationship with Egypt. No more spectacular, of course, than the video from al Jazeera, above, showing US-made F-16s buzzing thousands of protesters in Tahrir (Liberation) Square.

Meanwhile, in far less spectacular news, today Commerce Secretary Gary Locke and Energy Secretary Steven Chu will quietly be rolling out the White House's effort to "Startup America," which is either an effort to focus an investment on jobs or a cynical election year stunt.

The contrast, though, is instructive.

We have long publicly forsworn anything that resembles an industrial policy here in the US. But we actually do have an industrial policy; it's called the Military Industrial Complex (recently enhanced with the Intelligence Industrial Complex). While we refuse, as a country, to invest in technologies and jobs in manufacturing peaceful goods, an enthusiasm for investing unlimited amounts in military technology (the jobs are a critical side benefit) is almost a requirement among our elected leaders.

Not only do those toys provide desperately needed jobs around the country. Not only do these toys allow us to extend our empire around the world. But just as critically, they serve a critical role in maintaining our hegemony. We give millions and (in the case of Egypt) billions in aid to friendly leaders, and they turn around and spend it on our war toys. Many of these friendly leaders are dictators that use the toys as a veiled threat and occasionally a blunt instrument to sustain their own power.

Which leads to uncomfortable moments like these, where a dictator's last gasp consists of unleashing American war toys against his own people.

While the juxtaposition of those F-16s buzzing the brave protesters with this latest attempt to try to solve the jobs crisis in the US is just an odd coincidence, it needs to be instructive

as the Administration tries to “Startup America.” Not only do we need a more proactive jobs policy, an investment in goods that someone besides friendly dictators will want to buy. But if we don’t do that—if we don’t find something to make that won’t inevitably end up playing a starring role in a dictator’s brutality—then we’re going to have a lot more problems down the road.

Obama may really believe that we will “Win the Future” by out-innovating, out-building, and out-educating our competitors. Good. Because it’s increasingly clear the way to “Win the Future” is not by brutalizing other countries’ mobs.