

Free Good Advice

with love from Her Majesty's Government to Foreign Powers

Whatever has happened to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states?

Prime Minister David Cameron has issued a joint statement with his French and German counterparts [= French Prime Minister? President?] to express his “deep concern” over violence in Egypt.

He also personally telephoned President Hosni Mubarak to urge him to build democratic legitimacy in the country. (BBC Ceeefax, 30 January 2011)

Since then the advice has become more insistent. Mr Hague and Mr Cameron are now both saying daily that the transition to democracy in Egypt must be swift.

The exhortation to democratic legitimacy in societies where democracy has few adherents and no prospects has something in common with the medieval Western demand that sultanates should convert to Christianity. The subject of these exhortations is now, however, restricted to secular matters. If Mr Cameron phoned President Mubarak after the murder of twenty-one Christians in an Egyptian church on New Year's Day (erroneously supposed by some Muslims to be a Christian festival) it did not make the headlines.

A few years ago the proclamations of the new Democratic word were backed by force of arms in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some years earlier Eden unsuccessfully tried the same with Egypt. Now it must be better that we offer exhortation to Egypt rather than bombs. But why either?

The question must be what effects Messrs Hague and Cameron expect. The fatuity of supposing that the middle-eastern potentates will mend their ways if ticked off personally by the prime minister of a former imperial power! (The USA has more chance of calling the tune, but will it do a middle-eastern régime any harm to be seen to be resisting American dictation?) Practically, the courtesy of President Mubarak in taking Mr Cameron's call is remarkable. He has other things on his mind at present. We are not told, however, whether he said anything in reply or if so whether it was more than an expletive or two. It may be asked also whether the lecturings are intended to be reciprocal. Will Mr Cameron listen politely if President Mubarak rings him up with advice about whether to continue printing money?

Or could it be that Mr Cameron's real target audience is the British Media? as when on the same day he sent his best wishes to Andy Murray in the Australian Open. (Murray certainly needed them.) But why is the British public supposed to relish *de haut en bas* moral advice to the lesser breeds without democracy?

British foreign policy ought to be the decent and intelligent pursuit of the national interest. For instance the advent of an Islamist dictatorship in Egypt, possibly in alliance with Iran, though not a life-and-death matter for us, is not in the national interest. (It *is* a life-and-death matter for Israel, whose interventions may be expected to be more realistic and more effective.) Whatever influence Britain has ought to be directed towards encouraging the continuance of the moderately pro-Western Egyptian foreign policy of recent years.

Beyond that we should mind our own business. Mr Cameron has plenty of business to mind, if he could work out what it was.

to return to home page click www.edgewaysbooks.com