

Why we give foreign aid

By Charles Krauthammer

Sequestration is not the best time to be doling out foreign aid, surely the most unpopular item in the federal budget. Especially when the recipient is President Mohamed Morsi of Egypt.

Morsi is intent on getting the release of Omar Abdel-Rahman (the Blind Sheik), serving a life sentence for masterminding the 1993 World Trade Center attack that killed six and wounded more than a thousand. Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood is openly anti-Christian, anti-Semitic and otherwise prolifically intolerant. Just three years ago, Morsi called on Egyptians to nurse their children and grandchildren on hatred for Jews, whom he has called "the descendants of apes and pigs."

Not exactly Albert Schweitzer. Or even Anwar Sadat. Which left a bad taste when Secretary of State John Kerry, traveling to Cairo, handed Morsi a cool \$250 million. (A tenth of which would cover about 25 years of White House tours, no longer affordable under sequestration. Says the administration.)

Nonetheless, we should not cut off aid to Egypt. It's not that we must blindly support unfriendly regimes. It is perfectly reasonable to cut off aid to governments that are intrinsically hostile and beyond our influence. Subsidizing enemies is merely stupid.

But Egypt is not an enemy, certainly not yet. It may no longer be our strongest Arab ally, but it is still in play. The Brotherhood aims to establish an Islamist dictatorship. Yet it remains a considerable distance from having done so.

Precisely why we should remain engaged. And engagement means using our economic leverage.

Morsi has significant opposition. Six weeks ago, powerful anti-Brotherhood demonstrations broke out in major cities and have continued sporadically ever since. The presidential election that Morsi won was decided quite narrowly — three points, despite the Brotherhood's advantage of superior organization and a history of social service.

Moreover, having forever been in opposition, on election day the Islamists escaped any blame for the state of the country. Now in power, they begin to bear responsibility for

Egypt's miserable conditions — a collapsing economy, rising crime, social instability. Their aura is already dissipating.

There is nothing inevitable about Brotherhood rule. The problem is that the secular democratic parties are fractured, disorganized and lacking in leadership. And are repressed by the increasingly authoritarian Morsi.

His partisans have attacked demonstrators in Cairo. His security forces killed more than 40 in Port Said. He's been harassing journalists, suppressing freedom of speech, infiltrating the military and trying to subjugate the courts. He's already rammed through an Islamist constitution. He is now trying to tilt, even rig, parliamentary elections to the point that the opposition called for a boycott and an administrative court has just declared a suspension of the vote.

Any foreign aid we give Egypt should be contingent upon a reversal of this repression and a granting of space to secular, democratic, pro-Western elements.

That's where Kerry committed his mistake. Not in trying to use dollar diplomacy to leverage Egyptian behavior, but by exercising that leverage almost exclusively for economic, rather than political, reform.

Kerry's major objective was getting Morsi to apply for a \$4.8 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund. Considering that some of this \$4.8 billion ultimately comes from us, there's a certain comic circularity to this demand. What kind of concession is it when a foreign government is coerced into . . . taking yet more of our money?

We have no particular stake in Egypt's economy. Our stake is in its politics. Yes, we would like to see a strong economy. But in a country ruled by the Muslim Brotherhood?

Our interest is in a non-Islamist, nonrepressive, nonsectarian Egypt, ruled as democratically as possible. Why should we want a vibrant economy that maintains the Brotherhood in power? Our concern is Egypt's policies, foreign and domestic.

If we're going to give foreign aid, it should be for political concessions — on unfettered speech, on an opposition free of repression, on alterations to the Islamist constitution, on open and fair elections.

We give foreign aid for two reasons: (a) to support allies who share our values and our interests, and (b) to extract from less-than-friendly regimes concessions that either bring their policies more in line with ours or strengthen competing actors more favorably inclined toward American objectives.

That's the point of foreign aid. It's particularly important in countries like Egypt, whose fate is in the balance. But it will only work if we remain clear-eyed about why we give all that money in the first place.
