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On Iran, Obama has it right, the right doesn't

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In his just concluded press conference, President Obama used the strongest language so far regarding the turmoil in Iran. "Appalled," is a strong adjective. But, he was at pains to focus his condemnatory stance not at the election itself but at the violence against the protesters who are, he reminded us, exercising universally acknowledged rights to freedom of assembly and freedom of speech.

Why so circumspect? Because the quickest way to undermine the protesters in the eyes of their fellow Iranians would be to portray them as somehow doing the bidding of a nation that was not so long ago referred to consistently as "the Great Satan." The situation in Iran is like that in Darfur. If you want to make it worse, put an American spin on events. So, the president condemns the violence but not the election results, even though most analysts are concluding that the election had to be rigged. Of course, the country that brought you Bush v. Gore should be a bit reticent about criticizing others' electoral processes.

There is a side of every freedom-loving soul that wants to stand up and say "No" to the stealing of the election in Iran. We want the protesters to succeed in overturning the result. But, there is a little we can do to affect the outcome and any more direct involvement might only make matters worse. Silence in the face of injustice is never advisable, and it sure never feels good. But, sometimes, it is the better part of wisdom.

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