

SYRIA'S EVIL ASSAD REGIME

By

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The English meaning of the Arabic word Assad is lion. In the jungle, the lion is viewed as the king, as he is expected to be a more brutal monster.

Indeed, of all the Arab regimes that have been toppled since the start of the Arab Spring last year, Syria's Assad regime is the most dangerous. While it is impossible to quantify oppression and repression, the Assad regime has certainly surpassed its Tunisian, Egyptian, Libyan and Yemeni counterparts in its assault on the rights of its people and other Arabs over the years.

Although the other deposed Arab heads of state were ruthless and tyrannical beyond imagination, Assad's dictatorship is, in fact, of a distinct nature. In their failing efforts to delegitimize the revolutions in their countries, Bin Ali, Mubarak, Qaddafi and Saleh, all respectively tried to invoke their military and/or historic roles in nation-building of their countries, as a source of legitimacy.

For his part, Bashar Al-Assad can claim neither military heroism nor historic preeminence, for he enjoys neither. He has inherited his tight grab on power from his late father, Hafez Al-Assad who had instituted blatant deceitful ideology, tribal and partisan manipulation and brute force, as means for his rule. Bashar, who was detached from politics, was not to become President of Syria were it not for the intervention of some fateful circumstance: the elder son in the family, Basel, who was being groomed by his father to inherit the reign of power, got killed in a car accident in 1994. As Assad the father was dying in 2000, he instructed that the age requirement for presidency in the country's constitution be amended immediately from 40 to Bashar's age, 35 years. In so doing, President Assad had punctuated a new concept in Arab politics, monarchical-republicanism. His move became an envy for some Arab "presidents" to emulate. Thus was the goal of Mubarak of Egypt, Qaddafi of Libya and Saleh of Yemen before they met their respective destinies.

Since its rise to power in 1970, the Assad regime has been the most hypocritical and schizophrenic in the Arab region. While it has espoused Baathist socialism, it systematically secured the resources of the country only in the hands of a small group of self-serving individuals in government.

While it has advocated Arab unity, it proved to be the most devious. Its role in Lebanon after the start of the devastating 1975 civil war is graphically telling: Assad, the father was masterfully opportunistic in supporting and arming different conflicting groups against each other. Assad's instrumental role in creating splits and divisions among Palestinians is quite well-known in the Arab World, as he backed insurgents against the PLO in 1982 and as he, until recently, supported Hamas against the Palestinian Authority.

While it has claimed that it is the most progressive, it turned out to be the most backward regime, as it is grounded in tribalism and sectarianism. The Alawite sect to which the Assad regime belongs makes only 10% of Syria's population.

For the Syrians, Assad's regime has been the greatest evil that can befall a people. Over four decades of tyranny, the regime has regularly used the iron fist to crush opposition, as it savagely exterminated tens of thousands of Syrians in Hama in 1982. Since the start of the latest wave of protests last year, it has killed thousands of people and maimed and imprisoned many more thousands. The prison system it has established is known to be one of the most notorious in the world.

For the Palestinians, The Assad regime is the perpetrator of divisions and massacres, the most gruesome being the Tal Al-Zaatar massacre of thousands of Palestinian refugees it had committed in Lebanon, in 1976. For the Lebanese, the Assad regime is a constant reminder of the more than two decades destruction of their country during the civil war. For all other Arabs, the Assad regime is the exemplification of despotism which they have long rejected.

Given its many structural and functional detriments, the Assad regime itself understands that any serious meaningful reform in Syria today by necessity means its extinction, for it knows that it is lacking in representation and legitimacy. However, even the few supporters of the regime in Syria today recognize that Assad's days are numbered.

Following the widely-disputed Iraqi and Libyan model of regime change can bring about some of the most catastrophic results, not only for Syria, but also for the region as a whole. Syria's geo-strategic importance is not to be under-estimated.

For all intents and purposes, the solution should be mainly Arab in nature. In addition to mobilizing the already active Arab Street in support of the Syrian people, the Arab League needs to organize a credible Arab military force to maintain law and order in Syria and to provide protection for the Syrian people, exactly as it authorized the Syrian regime to send its forces in Lebanon, under the rubric of the Arab Deterrence Forces, supposedly to troubleshoot the civil war there.

In the face of Assad's brutal bombardment of its people, sending only Arab monitors amounts to inaction.

In view of the Russian and Chinese veto lately in the Security Council regarding Syria, the internationalization of the Syrian crisis seems to gratify the Assad regime, as it appears to have revived world polarization, in a manner reminiscent of the Cold War era.

It is compellingly obvious that conventional solutions for the Syrian dilemma will not work. Hence, the need for creative and innovative way out of the current quagmire is more pressing than ever before.

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