

Syria Strategy looks like Bloody Repeat

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Now that a United Nations official has declared the situation in Syria to be a civil war, it is legitimate for the western media to refer to the anti-regime forces as rebels.

Up until this juncture, those Syrians participating in the armed uprising, which began in March, 2011, were categorized as “pro-democracy demonstrators” or simply civilians. In turn, the security forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad have been labelled as monsters, goons, thugs and baby-killers.

Since the outset, the western powers, led by the U.S. and a cheerleading Canada, have declared their objective to be regime change in Syria.

Thus far, Canada’s position has entailed the tightening of sanctions, expulsion of diplomats and Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird screaming, “Assad must go!” at the now-empty Syrian Embassy in Ottawa.

In the black-and-white world of propaganda, this demonization of the Assad regime requires a counter-balance — lionizing the brave rebel forces who dare oppose him.

One problem with that is the fact that after 15 months of violent revolt, there isn’t a single pre-eminent leader emerging to unite the Syrian opposition under a single banner.

Instead, it is becoming clear that the loose coalition of rebel forces is a fractious collection based on tribal-ethnic loyalties and religious divisions. As Assad represents a secular platform, many of his enemies are in fact Islamic fundamentalists.

While that fact should automatically give one pause for thought, thinking is for sissies when the war drums are pounding — and John Baird ain’t no sissy. “Assad must go!”

One would think it would be virtually impossible to portray Islamic fundamentalists in a favourable light, especially after Canada has seen 158 killed and close to 2,000 wounded or injured battling similar fanatics in Afghanistan over the past decade.

Rick Hillier, the former chief of defence staff, referred to such individuals as “scumbags and murderers.” He denounced their tactic of employing improvised explosive devices as “cowardly.”

Now, even as our NATO allies continue to take mounting casualties in Afghanistan, western reporters embedded with Syrian rebel forces are painting the Islamic fundamentalists as heroic freedom fighters.

Last week, a report by David Enders, of the American media outlet McClatchy Newspapers, revealed that the Syrian rebels are using explosively formed penetrators to knock out Assad's armoured vehicles. It was noted that these same penetrators were the bane of U.S. forces during their occupation of neighbouring Iraq.

Again, this might make one contemplate the possibility that Assad is not beyond reason when he claims to be combating "foreign fighters bent on establishing an Islamic republic."

After all, this is the same type of enemy the Americans repeatedly claimed to be fighting in Iraq, and it appears they are using the same tactics and weaponry.

That would complicate things though, so it is best to just bellow: "Assad must go!"

Enders also reported that the rebels are now receiving a large influx of ammunition and weapons, presumed to be flowing across the Turkish border. This fact was somewhat contentious, as the rebels wish to continue being portrayed as defenceless underdogs by the western media.

However, as Enders wrote, "the improved supply of weapons to the rebels is clearly evident, both to reporters travelling in rebel-held areas and in the rising death toll among Syrian security forces in clashes with the rebels."

Now there is word that Russia may supply Assad with helicopter gunships so that his security forces might regain the upper hand.

This has prompted demands from the western powers for the UN to authorize a no-fly zone over Syria, which would allow NATO's air force to tip the balance in favour of the rebels, as they did in Libya.

That strategy, of course, brings us to look at the ongoing violence and instability in Libya these days, where tribes and militias are still battling for control in the post-Gadhafi power vacuum.

One other suggestion put forward was to furnish the Syrian rebels with sophisticated ground-to-air missiles so they could defeat the Russian helicopters in the same way the Afghan mujahedeen defeated the Soviets in the 1980s.

Yeah. That couldn't possibly backfire on us, could it?

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