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## THEY SAID IT

History, however, will not forgive those who, either from greed or a shared interest in promoting tyranny, colluded with, bribed, defended and helped this grotesque parody of a national leader rape and ruin his own unhappy land while he strutted ludicrously across the tawdry stage of world politics for forty pathetic years.

To name and shame everyone who colluded with this nasty piece of work — and a few are still standing by him now — would take far too long. But this moment in world history should not pass without a shout out to the worst of the worst...

Anybody can suck up to a bloodspattered, psychotic dictator for money. This is presumably what happened to the clueless (and in many cases poor) traditional tribal rulers and elders of Africa who, presumably in exchange for oil money stolen from the Libyan people, pretended to confer the meaningless title of Africa's "King of Kings" on the Exalted Loon.

But it takes a special kind of ugly to betray human rights on the scale of the UN's infamous "Human Rights Commission," a body whose members not only refused to resign en masse rather than see Libya seated on it, they went on to elect (by secret ballot, to protect the abjectly deprived from the just contempt of the civilized world) a representative of Gaddafi's Libya to the chairmanship of this self-parodying collection of imbeciles and lickspittles.

Walter Russell Mead, "World's Top Ten Gaddafi Toads," *The American Interest*, March 3, 2011

## REVOLUTION, REFORM, AND RELATIVE DEPRIVATION.

As the man whom Ronald Reagan dubbed "the mad dog of the Middle East" continues to slaughter his own people, the American president continues to dither. The Libyan resistance, which is literally fighting for its life, has begged for American help, even if only symbolic, and one rebel leader has gone so far as to plead for the United States to "send George Bush," apparently believing that an 86-year-old private citizen would be of more help than the current occupant of the White House.

Last week, the *Washington Post's* liberal columnist Ruth Marcus suggested — remorsefully — that the Obama presidency has become the "Where's Waldo" presidency, with the President disappearing on matters of great national and international import, preferring to blend-in with the crowd, rather than to lead it. The man has, as of yet, given no indication whatsoever of his plans, his ideas, his intentions, or much of anything else with regard to Libya or the broader explosion of revolutionary fervor throughout the Middle East. Worse yet, he

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has given no indication that he has thought much, or even at all, about what the causes of this explosion might have been, what the ramifications might be, or even the magnitude of the destruction and chaos that might ultimately result from this revolutionary flood. A full three months after the Tunisian Revolution and still Obama has failed to address the matter in a comprehensible, much less comprehensive way.

Fortunately for us, President Waldo is hardly the only source of informed speculation about the immediate future of the Middle East. Indeed, given his lack of experience, his apparent intellectual incuriosity, and his ideological predisposition to discount the observations and commentary of history, Waldo might not have much to say about the matter that couldn't be deciphered from even a cursory examination of revolutions past.

For our part, when it comes to revolution, we have always favored the work of the historian and political scientist Ted Robert Gurr, who is best known for his Perceived Relative Deprivation Theory, which posits that civil unrest and revolution tend, on the whole, to be the result of frustrated expectations. When a population believes that it should, as a matter of advancement, be entitled to certain benefits – personal, economic, technological – but is denied those benefits, it tends to grow restive.

In many or even most cases, Perceived Relative Deprivation can be expected in the wake of reform or economic liberalization. A people grow accustomed to certain liberties or economic gains and expect that those gains will continue uninterrupted. When the government fails to meet the people's expectations, for whatever reason, the people blame their rulers and demand greater change than the regime can deliver, leading inevitably to revolution.

In other cases – more prevalent today, we'd imagine – civil unrest grows when people are exposed to the wealth, freedom, or satisfaction enjoyed by other, often similar people. Their deprivation – relative to the abundance enjoyed by others – stirs resentment and hostility. For this reason, despotic governments

have always sought to control access to outside media. And, in the current context, it is hardly a coincidence that the young, educated, and technologically savvy urbanites of Tunisia and Egypt led the revolutions in those countries. After all, how ya gonna keep 'em down on the police state after they've seen the Internet? The perception of deprivation relative to expectations or to the liberties enjoyed by others is now and always has been a powerful predictor of civil unrest.

For the record, Gurr's theory, despite being incredibly helpful in understanding revolutionary phenomena and the course of civil unrest, is not exactly unique. Indeed, Perceived Relative Deprivation Theory builds on the work of countless scholars, including Robert Merton, Emile Durkheim, and most notably, Alexis de Tocqueville.

Tocqueville argued, among other things, that the French Revolution was spawned not by the absolute despotism of the *Ancien Regime*, but by the opposite, namely the regime's willingness to entertain the notion of reform, the rise of the middle class in the wake of said reforms, and the expectation on the part of both the middle class and the nobility that political and social liberalization was both inevitable and just. As the great historian himself put it:

The regime which is destroyed by a revolution is almost always an improvement on its immediate predecessor, and experience teaches that the most critical moment for bad governments is the one which witnesses their first steps toward reform.

Given all of this, from Tocqueville to Gurr, one can develop a less-than-intellectual but nonetheless effective shorthand for determining which governments are susceptible to revolution and which revolutionary efforts stand the greatest chance of success. In essence, revolutions tend to occur and to succeed in those places in which they are not entirely critical or seemingly inevitable. Rather, they take place (and succeed) in environments that are emancipated

enough to allow the fomentation and organization of dissent and in which the existing regime is less than entirely despotic or has grown more forgiving over time.

True despots, for example, don't allow the Berlin Wall to be torn down in full view of their soldiers, but rather roll the tanks into Tiananmen Square. Revolution-resistant despots don't implement *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*, but maintain their gulags and secret police services.

Revolutions tend to take place and to succeed where the people no longer fear the regime and no longer believe that it has the moral and material capacity to slaughter mutineers. In terms of the present revolutionary fervor in the Middle East, the great British historian Paul Johnson put it this way in an interview with *The Wall Street Journal* just this past weekend:

Mr. Johnson says he doesn't follow politics closely anymore, but he quickly warms to the subject of the Middle East. The rash of uprisings across the Arab world right now is "a very interesting phenomenon," he says.

"It's something that we knew all about in Europe in the 19th century. First of all we had the French Revolution and its repercussions in places like Germany and so on. Then, much like this current phenomenon, in 1830 we had a series of revolutions in Europe which worked like a chain reaction. And then in 1848, on a much bigger scale—that was known as the year of revolutions."

In 1848, he explains, "Practically every country in Europe, except England of course . . . had a revolution and overthrew the government, at any rate for a time. So that is something which historically is well-attested and the same thing has happened here in the Middle East."

Here he injects a note of caution: "But I notice it's much more likely that a so-called dictatorship will be overthrown if it's not a real dictatorship. The one in Tunisia wasn't very much. Mubarak didn't run a real dictatorship [in Egypt]. *Real dictatorships in that part of the world,*" such as *Libya*, are a different story. [Emphasis added]

In the specific case of Libya, one might have expected revolution not to occur at all, given the "Mad Dog's" reputation. But that expectation would be based on a rather shoddy reading of recent history. For all his wickedness, Gadhafi actually did begin to liberalize over the past decade, seizing the opportunity provided him by the deposition, at American hands, of Saddam Hussein.

Recall that Gadhafi, who was deeply impressed and deeply disturbed by the speed with which the American military dispatched Saddam, gave up his own WMD programs last decade and attempted to re-enter the "community of nations." The international community lifted its sanctions; Gadhafi relaxed his travel and trade restrictions; and, as is often the case with "reformed" dictators, leftists in Hollywood and among America's academics crowed about the "new" Libya.

As it turned out, though, the new Libya was very much like the old Libya, and the Libyans themselves are now paying the price for realizing this too late. Gadhafi was pacified enough to allow insurgents to consider the possibility of overthrow, but nowhere near enough to accede to his own demise.

Our expectation in this specific case is that regime change in Libya depends entirely on the success of the rebellion, which is to say that Gadhafi is hardly likely to change his mind and decide to submit peacefully. He will, quite simply, have to be defeated. He will have to be killed or convinced by circumstance to kill himself (ala Hitler). He will not surrender.

And why should he? If he can get away with slaughtering American GIs at a disco and bringing down a jetliner loaded with Western civilians, why shouldn't he believe that he can and will get away with the mass slaughter of his fellow Libyans? He is hardly averse to spilling blood, in other words, and now it is only a matter of how much he will spill before he or his enemies are defeated.

Up until this weekend, we were actually hopeful that Gadhafi would, in fact, be defeated and thus meet the just end that President Reagan tried unsuccessfully to provide him a quarter century ago. We're not so hopeful now – not because we have any real sense how the rebellion itself is going but because we are sensing that the only truly interested outsiders in this war are those who have an immediate stake in the outcome. And the majority of those undoubtedly wish to see Gadhafi spared and his regime strengthened.

Last week, we noted reports that Iranian Republican Guards have bases within Libya, from which they were presumably aiding Gadhafi and his mercenary thugs. This week, there are reports from *The Jerusalem Post*, among others, that Syrian mercenaries and soldiers are also aiding Gadhafi. Additionally, *Al Jazeera* reports that “Libyan rebels shot down two Syrian planes in Ras Lanuf,” – which is to say that while the Obama administration continues to insist that a no-fly zone over Libya would do no good, the Syrian dictator Bashar Assad is determined to prove otherwise.

And speaking of Syria, it is important to note, we believe, that while Libya is the rogue regime *du jour*, it is hardly the last regime in the region that will face unrest and hardly the most important. Indeed, Syria may eventually set the tone for much of the rest of the region.

On the one hand, we should recall that the Syrian Ba'athist dictatorship is hardly above the wanton, wholesale slaughter of its own people in the pursuit of eliminating internal dissent. In 1982, at Hama, for example, the Assad regime killed somewhere between 25,000 and 40,000 men, women, and children, as it put down a Muslim Brotherhood-inspired insurgency.

On the other hand, the Assad at the head of the regime today is not the same Assad who willingly ordered the slaughter at Hama. Bashar Assad, the son of the gruesome Hama murderer, Hafez al-Assad, is now the man in charge and is largely untested. One suspects he shares his father's disdain for the lives of others, but that is an unproven assumption.

The leaders of the region's other murderous rogue regime, by contrast, have been thoroughly tested. And proven ghastly. Today, as for the last three decades, the Mad Mullahs of Iran and their toadie-president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad constitute the greatest threat to stability in the Middle East – and therefore in the world. And they are, unquestionably, as vicious and profane as one can find. If you're looking for Paul Johnson's “real dictatorships” you need look no further than Tehran, the city the world's most heinous dictators call home.

Two years ago, the Iranian regime proved to its people that a little access to the Internet should not be confused with genuine reform or acquiescence with respect to personal liberty. In the wake of the fraudulent re-election of Ahmadinejad – orchestrated ham-handedly by Supreme Leader himself, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei – the Iranian people declared their intention to change the nature of their government. But unlike the regime they challenged thirty years prior, this one did not go gently into that good night. This one had learned the lessons of history.

The challenge to the Mullahs was strong. But the Mullahs' response was stronger. And anyone who any longer hopes or believes that the “Green Revolution” started two years ago will continue and will achieve the ultimate end of regime change has simply has not been paying attention. The Iranian resistance was brave and continues to be brave. But the Mullahs were ferocious. And they continue to be ferocious. More to the point, they remain completely devoid of any compunction whatsoever when it comes to the use of force in defense of their “Islamic” republic.

Equally, if not more important, the Mullahs are not content in keeping their own people enslaved, but have decided to use the abdication of American authority

in the region to advance their goals of regional hegemony. As we noted above, the Syrian regime is illustrative of the broader dynamics at work in the region, and this is so because the Iranians have taken a particular interest in Syria. But Syria is not alone in attracting the Mullahs' attention.

We wrote several weeks ago about the Iranian offers to the Egyptian rebels. And we noted above the Iranian involvement in Libya. The inimitable Caroline Glick fills us in on the rest of the Iranians' activities:

In testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee on Tuesday, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton acknowledged that Iran is deeply involved in all the anti-regime protests and movements from Egypt to Yemen to Bahrain and beyond.

“Either directly or through proxies, they are constantly trying to influence events. They have a very active diplomatic foreign policy outreach,” Clinton said.

Iranian officials, Hezbollah and Hamas terrorists and other Iranian agents have played pivotal roles in the anti-regime movements in Yemen and Bahrain. Their operations are the product of Iran's long-running policy of developing close ties to opposition figures in these countries as well as in Egypt, Kuwait, Oman and Morocco.

These long-developed ties are reaping great rewards for Iran today. Not only do these connections give the Iranians the ability to influence the policies of post-revolutionary allied regimes.

They give the mullahs and their allies the ability to intimidate the likes of the Saudi and Bahraini royals and force them to appease Iran's allies.

The Iranians are doing their very best, in short, to steel the will of those regimes they wish to see preserved and, at the same time, to undermine those regimes they wish to see toppled. Unlike the American president – or the British prime minister or anyone else for that matter – the Iranians seem to understand quite well the dynamics at work in revolutions and are doing all that they can to affect those dynamics. In many ways, the outcome of the clashes in various lesser Middle Eastern nations may depend on the ability of the Mullahs to affect either the people's perception of the regime or the regime's perception of the people – depending, of course, on their preferred outcome.

Meanwhile, the one major player in the region whose fate is as of yet completely unknown is Saudi Arabia. It is clear to this point that there is real anti-regime resistance in the Saudi kingdom, particularly in the Shi'ite regions, where most the country's oil is deposited. It is also clear that the royal family and its various hangers on are quite nervous about the ultimate effect that this resistance might have. The Saudis' willingness to throw money at their people in the hope of quieting their displeasure suggests a genuine sense of foreboding among the ruling class.

The question now is to what lengths the Iranians will go to stir up the restive Shi'ite populations in Saudi Arabia and to what lengths the Saudi royals will go to counter the native restlessness and the Iranian subterfuge. Our sense, for what it's worth, is that the Saudi regime is soft. It appears brutal at times because of the aggressiveness and radicalism of its religious authorities. But the royal class itself is exceptionally soft and, more or less, debased.

Whether or not the Saudi's perversions include the willingness to slaughter its own rebellious people remains to be seen. Needless to say, we have our doubts, which is to say that the ultimate disposition of the Saudi regime will probably hinge on the strength of the resistance it meets. The longer the unrest continues, the more likely revolution will be, in our estimation. According to our shorthand, the more the regime sweats and the more it feels the need

to concede the opposition's demand, the stronger internal resistance will become and the more likely that external agitation from Iran will produce results.

None of this is set in stone, naturally. And we are, of course, merely speculating. But then, that's sort of our job, to speculate about the future and the likelihood of politically relevant change and to anticipate the effect that those changes will have on the political and geopolitical status quo.

That is also, coincidentally, the job of the President of the United States – or at least a big part of his job. And believe it or not, his efforts to this end are far more important than our own. Which is why we are having such a difficult time understanding why he seems so disinterested in the project. Our optimistic guess is that he'll give it some attention when March Madness is over early next month. Who knows?

## **OBAMA AND THE HARD LEFT'S FOREIGN POLICY FANTASY.**

Last week, while researching the above piece on revolution in the Middle East, we stumbled upon the most interesting, disheartening, and telling article we have read to date about the Obama administration and its approach to the unrest that has plagued the region since December.

In an article for *The New Republic*, that magazine's literary editor, Leon Wieseltier, discussed the developing Obama doctrine and noted that said doctrine consist mostly of talking . . . and little else:

“This violence must stop.” So President Obama declared the other day about the depravity in Tripoli. This “must” is a strange mixture of stridency and passivity. It is the deontic locution familiar from the editorial pages of newspapers, where people who have no power to change the course of events demand that events change their course. This “must” denotes an order, or a permission, or an obligation, or a wish,

or a will. It does not denote a plan. It includes no implication, no expectation, of action. It is the rhetoric of futility: this infection must stop, this blizzard must stop, this madness must stop. But this infection, this blizzard, this madness, like this violence, will not stop, because its logic is to grow.

What was most fascinating about the article, though, was not Wieseltier's conclusion that Obama has the grit to do little more than blather feebly, but his explanation as to why this is so. To this end, he cites the President's big, breakthrough statement on Libya thusly:

So let me be clear. The change that is taking place across the region is being driven by the people of the region. This change doesn't represent the work of the United States or any foreign power. It represents the aspirations of people who are seeking a better life.

This is, to put it mildly, amazing stuff. Wieseltier concludes that “They [the Libyans] are fighting authoritarianism, but he is fighting imperialism.” We could quibble with Wieseltier about the accuracy of the term “imperialism,” we suppose, since we have never seen any evidence at all of American imperialism. But that's a minor beef. And beyond that, he is absolutely right. The people of the Middle East are throwing off the chains of totalitarianism and, in many cases, fighting for their lives. Barack Obama, by contrast, is waging an ideological war, fiddling while the Middle East burns in order to make the point that America's interventionist past is culturally insensitive. . . . or some such folderol.

What we have here is a rather uncomplicated distillation of the left's view of America's place in the world. To Obama – and to those who share his world view – American involvement in any foreign matter is, by definition, corrupting. The outcome of involvement is irrelevant. What matters are intentions. And American intentions are always malign. And they

are always debasing to those who would, in theory, be the beneficiaries of involvement, which makes American action the greater of evils, even when the other evil is mass slaughter at the hands of a tyrant.

That this is twisted is beyond doubt. That it is the general sentiment on the left is also largely beyond doubt. As we put it in a piece last November:

Obama's political predilections – his rejection of the “special relationship” with Britain, his world apology tour, his own obsession with America's wrongs and not its rights – are all far more easily explained by the fact that he is a liberal in the great tradition of the post-60s liberals. He is one of them, no more, no less... We [have] called Obama the first “post-Western” president in America, noting that he had always been “associated, both personally and intellectually, with the strains of American leftism that have always tended to see the United States and its Western progenitors as forces for evil rather than good in the world, the pseudo-intellectual types whom the late Ambassador Kirkpatrick famously described as the ‘blame America first’ crowd.”

What we now know in addition is that Obama presumes that the rest of the world shares his view of America and of American interventionism. He believes, for example, that Libyans would rather die than to have their revolution tainted by filthy American hands. And he is willing to let them do so to soothe his injudicious conscience. It doesn't matter if the Libyans say they want American help and explicitly call on the United States to “send George Bush,” – just like it doesn't matter that the Egyptians in Tahrir Square wanted American help and also explicitly asked for it. Obama knows better. He not only knows better than the American interventionist-capitalist-exploiters, he also knows better than the hapless and helpless indigenous people what they need, even if they insist they know otherwise. They

are, it would appear, victims of a false consciousness (to borrow a Marxist term), and he must decide for them what is in their best interests based on his clearer, more sophisticated understanding of the world and of America's deleterious role in it.

Now, this is, we would note, an entirely new application of American foreign policy. The idea is not new, of course, but the implementation of it most certainly is.

The last two Democratic presidents – Clinton and Carter – at least viewed the United States as a force for good in the world, assuming, that is, that its actions could be seen as altruistic, rather than self-interested. During the Clinton presidency, our old friend and the Christian A. Herter Professor and Director of the American Foreign Policy program at the Johns Hopkins' School for Advanced International Studies (SAIS), Michael Mandelbaum described this application of American power as “foreign policy as social work.” More recently, the columnist and author Mark Steyn called it “liberal interventionism,” which boils down to: The fact that we have no reason to get into it justifies our getting into it.”

For Obama, by contrast, nothing justifies “our getting into it.” Nothing makes it OK for America to start dropping bombs or threatening to shoot down planes. Nothing at all can justify sully the great and noble indigenous movements with dirty American residue. At the very least, American action must be sanctioned by the global community – specifically the United Nations – thereby lending said action the imprimatur of globalist morality and removing the United States as the primary or even essential actor in any interventions.

All of this may make Obama feel better about himself and may fulfill decades of hard-left foreign policy fantasies. But it also condemns the people of the world to a rather cruel fate. The aforementioned Michael Mandelbaum – who, for the record, is (or at least was) left of center politically – wrote a book about five years ago called *The Case For Goliath: How America Acts As The World's Government in the Twenty-first Century*, in which he argued that American

interventionism was justified and, indeed, necessary because it was so much better, so much more humane, and so much more likely to produce positive outcomes than any of the potential alternatives.

Well...the people of Libya are now, sadly, serving as real-life evidence of Mandelbaum's theory, proving that the Obamian-leftist alternative to the American Goliath leads inevitably to greater and more savage slaughter on the part of global bad actors. If it makes them feel better, though, the Libyans can console themselves with the notion that at least they're doing their bit to put America in its place and convince it to stop insisting that it somehow holds an "exceptional" place in the global order.

In conclusion, we should note that none of the above – our critique of Obama – suggests that we believe that American presidents should go around indiscriminately picking spots to flex American muscle and lean on bad guys. We prefer, as we have written countless times in these pages, that American foreign policy be replete with caution, modesty, and self-interest.

At the same time, the wanton slaughter of innocents strikes us as an opportunity for an American president, at the very least, to flex his rhetorical muscles and lead, rather than follow global opinion.

More to the point, shaping the future of the "new" Middle East strikes us as an incredibly important to America's self-interest – what with all the oil and terrorism.

Of course, Obama doesn't really see it that way, which is strange and disquieting thing to know about an American president. Or as Wieseltier concludes, "It is so foolish, and so sad, and so indecent."

Indeed.

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