

Libyans must show Gadhafi the door



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Inside
Defence

If there is one thing clearly emerging from the situation in Libya, it's that the fog of war is as obfuscating as it ever was—even in this high-tech information age.

Despite the accessibility of Internet, mobile phones, satellite imagery and countless other means of instantaneous social networking, the early media reports coming out of embattled President Moammar Gadhafi's fiefdom have been consistently inaccurate.

In the first few days of the uprising, while the self-proclaimed rebellion was still limited to the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi, Western news agencies circulated the rumour that Gadhafi had fled his country and was seeking refuge in Venezuela.

The source of this unfounded claim turned out to be none other than British Prime Minister David Cameron, who should have subsequently fired the director of the M16 intelligence agency.

Even after Gadhafi later appeared on Libyan television, looking like a waxed dummy and raving about fighting to the death, most pundits commenting on the crisis opined that the Libyan leader's 40-year reign was about to expire within days, if not hours.

Then came the almost inexplicable momentum shift as security forces still loyal to Gadhafi began



Libyan Leader Moammar Gadhafi with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon in 2008.

to recapture territory and towns from the rebels.

Commentators, who had been speculating as to whether or not Gadhafi would take his own life rather than face exile or prosecution suddenly had to reverse course. The supposedly despised madman of Libya still had loyal followers, and his resurgent fighters appeared to be getting the upper hand.

This, of course, led to calls for an internationally enforced no-fly zone, which would theoretically eliminate Gadhafi's rudimentary air force from the battlefield equation and presumably tilt the balance back in favour of the rebels. Many of these military authorities argued that the enforcement of a no-fly zone would somehow stop short of a direct combat intervention.

But as mad as he may be, Gadhafi has correctly labelled the rebellion in his country to be an internal security situation, and that any international intervention would be an act of unprovoked aggression. That includes US or NATO aircraft shooting down Libyan planes over Libyan airspace.

Very few and only the most intrepid Western reporters have managed to get close to any actual fighting inside Libya. Instead, most of the foreign correspondents covering the war are doing so from neighbouring countries.

While there has indeed been a steady flow of refugee-seekers pouring out of Libya since the unrest began, the vast majority are foreigners working in Libya's oil fields, and who have been ordered out of danger by their employers.

With so little confirmed information available about the situation on the ground, it would be difficult for the US or an international coalition to justify intervention in Libya based on humanitarian relief.

Already bogged down in disastrous campaigns in both Iraq and Afghanistan, the US is loathe to be seen using its martial might to topple another "rogue" regime—especially with the entire Arab world tottering on the brink of a massive political upheaval.

If the Libyan people are going to overthrow Gadhafi, they are going to have to be seen as doing

it themselves.

This has led to some serious discussions about the possibility of the US making weapons and munitions available to the rebels.

The problem with this concept is the fact that, up until now, no clear rebel leader has emerged and no one has released a public manifesto of what the rebellion hopes to achieve.

There is a lot at stake in Libya in the form of the vast oil riches in the eastern provinces. Inflaming tribal resentment in Libya may simply be a violent means towards gaining control of that lucrative revenue.

For example, we all recognize that the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang maintains an extensive network involved in nefarious and illegal activities.

Nevertheless, we would not automatically presume that if some other organization, let's say Satan's Choice, began a campaign of violence against the Hell's Angels, that it would be in the interest of restoring law and order to Canadian streets.

And we certainly wouldn't send in our police tactical units to take sides in what would amount to nothing more than a turf war.

If there is enough of a groundswell of resentment against Gadhafi, the Libyan people will indeed force him from power—and rejoice in their own accomplishment.

Given the lack of reliable information available to date, it has been almost impossible to make any accurate predictions, let alone produce a solid argument for a dubious military intervention.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Liberal MP Jim Karygiannis.

Macedonians demand Karygiannis's resignation

RE: "Rebel politicians fire up ethnic rage," March 9) Liberal MP Jim Karygiannis spewed out more anti-Macedonian hate at a lecture entitled "Insight to Hellenism" at the University of Toronto on March 5.

While praising the lecture, which glorified Greece's policy of denying the existence and persecution of its large Macedonian minority and which defended Greece's bombing of Macedonian civilians during Greece's Civil War, Karygiannis once again referred to Macedonians as "Skopjans."

This is a term used by Greece to negate the ethnic identity of Macedonians and evokes Greece's horrific campaigns, past and present, at ethnically cleansing or forcibly assimilating its large Macedonian minority.

Karygiannis encouraged one of the guest speakers, Christos Karatzios, to send a letter to Canadian MPs and to "come and enlighten the rest of my colleagues on what is Greece." He accused Prime Minister Stephen Harper of "selling out" Greek-Canadians because of the Conservative Party's recognition of Macedonia.

But will the Liberal Party reprimand him?

Karygiannis referred to Macedonians as "Skopjans" in an interview for the *Globe and Mail* on Sept. 21, 2007, following Canada's recognition of the Republic of Macedonia.

Canadian-Macedonians were outraged and flooded the Liberal Party with demands that Karygiannis be reprimanded. The Liberal Party ignored the issue and instead chose to attack the Conservative Party's recognition of Macedonia, pandering to the Greek-Canadian community.

Ironically, the Liberal Party and their apologists consistently accuse the Conservative Party of the underhanded tactics that Liberals employ. The federal and provincial Conservatives have come under recent attack for targeting ethnic voters and for ties to banned separatist groups.

However, pandering to ethnic communities is a Liberal specialty.

The Macedonian Human Rights Movement International calls on Canadian politicians, regardless of party affiliation, to demand Jim Karygiannis's immediate resignation. We ask that concerned Canadians do the same. Jim Karygiannis's continued presence in Parliament is an affront to traditional Canadian values.

Bill Nicholov
President,
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Time to bring Saeed Malekpour home

BRYON WILFERT

For months, Fatima Eftekhari has been repeating the same impassioned plea: "Stephen Harper, bring my husband home."

The outspoken wife of Canadian resident Saeed Malekpour, Ms. Eftekhari knows it will take direct action by the federal government—and perhaps even the prime minister—to see her husband safely returned to Canada after he was issued a death sentence in Iran last November on charges related to operating an adult website.

Yet while Ms. Eftekhari pleads for her husband's life, the prime minister and the minister of foreign affairs, Lawrence Cannon, have cast a foreboding cone of silence around Mr. Malekpour's case.

Sadly, his silence extends from the House of Commons out to the Iranian Embassy in Ottawa and into Mr. Malekpour's hometown of Richmond Hill, Ont..

It's evident when Mr. Cannon turns aside opposition questions on the matter during Question Period (as was the case on Dec.

15) and when officials from the Iranian Embassy tell me they have not heard from the government even once on this issue. It's also evident when Ms. Eftekhari contacts my office and asks why the prime minister still hasn't responded to any of her letters.

Perhaps worst of all, however, this silence is evident in Tehran, where executions are a daily occurrence, and where only extensive diplomatic pressure seems capable of saving the lives of prisoners on death row.

It was, after all, only vocal and near-global opposition that seems to have saved the life of Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani, whose execution was stayed indefinitely in September by Iranian authorities under the heat of international pressure.

At the time, Mr. Cannon played a leading role in voicing Canadian opposition to Ms. Ashtiani's death, issuing numerous statements and press releases directly addressing her case. He has also spoken out in similar fashion on behalf of other Iranians facing long prison terms or lengthy death sentences, including a recent statement condemning the

11-year prison sentence handed down to Iranian human rights activist Nasrin Sotoudeh.

But while Ms. Ashtiani, Ms. Sotoudeh and other Iranian recipients of Canadian support have little or no connection to Canadian society, Mr. Malekpour has lived in Canada, has a wife in Richmond Hill, and has gained permanent residency while awaiting his opportunity to become a full-fledged Canadian citizen.

In the one and only statement Mr. Cannon released in which he directly addressed his case on Dec. 10, Mr. Malekpour still appears as a mere afterthought: a second-fiddle to Ms. Ashtiani.

And while Prime Minister Harper and Minister Cannon continue to publicly criticize the Iranian regime for perceived human rights abuses at each and every turn, neither has yet tried to engage the regime directly in Mr. Malekpour's defence. Although this type of "megaphone diplomacy" may be politically palatable, it won't bring Mr. Malekpour home without overwhelming international help.

Having met frequently with top officials from the Iranian

Embassy in Ottawa over the last few months, I believe it is very much within the government's power to secure Mr. Malekpour's safe return to Canada. But with the Iranian Supreme Court already reviewing his case with an eye to confirming his death sentence, time is of the essence.

Simply put, Mr. Harper and Mr. Cannon must make an important decision now: they can either continue to ignore Mr. Malekpour's case and reap domestic political gains by verbally assaulting the Iranian regime at every possible turn; or they can open a dialogue with the Iranian Embassy in Ottawa, and attempt to find a real solution that will save Mr. Malekpour's life.

This is not to say that the government should not continue to point out Iran's perceived human rights shortcomings. But perhaps it is time to realize that Iran cannot be shamed into returning a member of the Canadian community.

The ball is in the government's court. Stephen Harper: bring Mr. Malekpour home now.

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