

What Isn't Helping Qadhafi

Пише: Paul R. Pillar

четвртак, 24 фебруар 2011 23:15

(The National Interest, February 24, 2011)



Although the final chapter of Muammar Qadhafi's regime has not quite been written, in his 41 years in power he has never before faced anything remotely like the current uprising. The uncertainties of what might come after the current regime are at least as great as the corresponding uncertainties in any other Middle Eastern state, given Qadhafi's long tenure as dictator and the absence of any obvious organization or structure in either politics or civil society that so far can credibly present itself as an alternative. Despite the uncertainties, there are good reasons to wish Qadhafi a speedy departure—not least of all the brutality with which the regime has responded to the recent protests.

The protestors in Libyan cities so far do not seem to be deterred by anything. In that regard, and notwithstanding Qadhafi's still for the moment trying to cling to power, it is not too early to draw an important lesson about the policies of outside powers toward troublesome states such as Libya and what effect those policies do or do not have on political change in those states. Among the things that do not seem to be deterring those who are endangering their lives to oppose the regime is the fact that western governments have been doing more or less normal business with the Libyan regime for the last several years, following the U.S.-British-Libyan agreement of 2003. The regime itself doesn't seem to be drawing any support from that fact; in his defiant and rambling speech on Tuesday, Qadhafi excoriated the United States and Britain along with everyone else he excoriated. He evidently doesn't think he has a respected-by-the-West card to play.

The significance of this fact is that it contradicts much argumentation about policies toward rogue states—argumentation that sees foreign engagement and internally driven political change as mutually contradictory. The notion is that if outside powers do business with a distasteful regime, this somehow helps to inoculate it against whatever rot it may be experiencing within. The further notion is that outside powers must choose between, on one hand, engaging with the distasteful regime and in so doing buying into having it stick around for the long haul and, on the other hand, not engaging and placing one's hopes entirely on regime change.

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