

MIDDLE EAST

Syria, an example of the West's short-sighted foreign policy

WORLD

12_12_2024



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The **Daily Compass** has already written that so much euphoria in European and Western chanceries over the fall of Bashar al-Assad in Syria is at the very least a risky speculation, especially given who will replace him. But it is interesting to dwell on this suspicious

need for a blatantly false narrative - proclaimed by politicians and supported by the mainstream media - to justify one's political motives.

Once again, an attempt is being made to simplify democracies versus dictatorships, liberators versus oppressors. But this kind of schema, already questionable in the ongoing conflict in Europe, becomes ridiculous in the Middle East.

Was Syria under the Assad family a vicious dictatorship?

Certainly, and it also had expansionist aims, if we remember the role Syria played first in the Yom Kippur War (1973) and then in the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), which ended with the long Syrian occupation of Lebanon. But who in the region can cast the first stone against Assad? Who can claim to be the champion of democracy and freedom? Saudi Arabia, which enforces the law of the Koran, or Erdogan's Turkey, which pursues the extermination of the Kurds? Or Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, the Arab Emirates, which are all countries mentioned in the reports of humanitarian organisations for human rights violations? It doesn't count that the Christian communities, for example, in Syria, although their freedom is very limited, enjoy a space, however small, that is a chimera in the surrounding countries.

Moreover the jubilation for the end of Assad seems even more absurd considering who has taken command in Damascus: jihadists who have changed their acronyms but not their modus operandi, and who are now being portrayed as moderates in Europe and the United States in order to keep the above narrative alive. 'Double-breasted' jihadists, one might say, to reassure the so-called international public opinion (assuming there is one), but who are actually buying time to consolidate their power, after which we will see their true face. Just as happened in Afghanistan with the Taliban in 2021.

The situation is so paradoxical that, in order to be consistent with the 'Assad is the source of all evil' narrative, millions of Syrians who have found refuge in Europe and other Middle Eastern countries are now in danger of being repatriated because, as they say, there is no more Assad in Syria and freedom has returned. Too bad that the vast majority of them were not fleeing Assad, but the civil war that began in 2011, of which Assad was only one of the protagonists. And as for freedom, it is best to avoid that thorny issue.

This does not mean that Assad should be glorified or made a martyr. But it is necessary to be realistic. The point is the Syrian president was driven from power not because of the brutality of his regime, but because he was an ally of Iran and Russia, because a pro-Iranian Syria was a strategic gateway to fuel the war against Israel, because however secular the regime was, it was an important pawn in the Islamic

conflict between Sunnis and Shiites. Let us be honest: if Bashar al-Assad had been pro-Western, for our diplomats and journalists he would have been able to quietly continue the bloody repression of his opponents.

And here is the second aspect to highlight: the short-sightedness of a foreign policy based on the principle that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'. Syria has long been considered by the United States (and closely by Europe) as the number one target in the region, so the jihadists, the only ones with the strength and support to bring down the Assad regime, became allies for the occasion. This is nothing new, it is a recurring pattern, but it is a tactic that history shows will only yield positive results in the short term. Afghanistan, to be the most recent example in terms of time, which should be sufficient proof that such an approach soon boomerangs. You cannot fight one evil with another, or even a worse one.

Toppling a regime that has managed to hold together a country of different ethnicities and religions with an extremist religious faction is likely to lead to a new civil war - as has already happened in Iraq - and certainly to a dictatorship similar to the previous one, if not worse.

For Europe and the United States, there may be an immediate gain in an anti-Russian and anti-Iranian perspective, but in the long run, finding Syria in the centre of the Middle East in the hands of a radical Islamist group will create many more problems for the stability of the region. The same goes for Israel, which immediately took advantage of the situation to conquer part of Syrian territory, the buffer zone in the Golan, in homage to the 'Greater Israel' ideology. But in time it will have to deal with an enemy even worse than Assad.

In any case, it is already clear that the regime change in Damascus will lead to a further expansion of Turkey's influence in the region and a further shrinking of the European Union. All the more reason it's difficult to understand what justifies all the celebrations in Brussels.