

Why Syria Is Not Libya

Пише: Nikolas K. Gvosdev
уторак, 19 јун 2012 14:00

(The National Interest, June 13, 2012)

History offers important warnings for those who think Assad will go quietly.



As the violence continues in Syria, the prevailing assumption is that the regime of Bashar al-Assad is on its last legs. Even if it is not dislodged by overt Western action (such as an air campaign similar to the one undertaken in the skies over Libya last year), many believe that a tipping point has been reached that, sooner or later, will result in a change of government—that Assad cannot put down the uprising and that, over time, his regime will be weakened by ongoing defections from his security apparatus.

This was, after all, how events unfolded in Libya. But Libya may not be the best prism through which to interpret events in Syria.

The first problem is asserting that a minority group cannot maintain its domination over the political system against the demands of an assertive majority. Yet the recent political history of Rwanda, for instance, shows how the minority Tutsi—even after suffering the 1994 genocide—have remained the dominant political class in the country despite constituting only 15 percent of the population, a proportion not dissimilar to the number of Alawites within the Syrian population. Paul Kagame was reelected as president with 93 percent of the vote in 2010, and the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) dominates the parliament. Freedom House ranks Rwanda as a “not-free country,” of course, and the government has a number of tools at its disposal to keep the status quo intact—but the reality is also that a sufficient number of Hutu have supported Kagame and the RPF, identifying with its goals of modernization and development. The current prime minister—Pierre Damien Habumuremyi—is of Hutu ethnicity, just as in Syria a number of key posts were allotted to Sunnis loyal to the regime.

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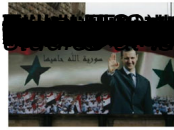
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