



Does The U.S. Really Care About Repression In Syria?

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): The only thing we're being told in the West over and over and over again is that Assad was a brutal dictator. He was repressive and violent towards Syrians. Syrians are thrilled, in large part, that their dictator is gone. And you can't say that's untrue. You can go and talk to Syrians in Syria and every region in Syria other than perhaps Assad strongholds where there are religious minorities who are petrified and who always felt protected by him. But other than that, you can go to pretty much any region in Syria, any part of the region in the Middle East, Syrian immigrants throughout the West and they're all going to tell you roughly the same thing, that it's true that Bashar al -Assad and his father before him was a heinous dictator and we feel happy to see him go, we feel happy to watch the people in those prisons being liberated. And when you only focus on that emotion, which is

very strong and very genuine, it will by design prevent you from asking how did we get to this point? Who drove us to this point? With what motives? It wasn't just the Syrian people organically rising up against a very well-armed and well-funded government and toppling them. Obviously, they were backed by a lot of foreign influences, a lot of great powers with money and arms who have motives quite different from "we want to bring freedom to the Syrian people".

Even if driving Assad out makes them feel as though that's what they've acquired. But it also can bind you to what's coming. What are the real consequences of this? Not just for the region or for our geostrategic interests, but for the Syrian people whose freedom we're celebrating. Is this freedom likely to remain? Are they likely to feel joyous? Will Syrian refugees who have come to Europe and the United States and other places in the world over the past 10 years be eager to return because they trust that what's coming is actually something that will enable their society to flourish? All of that is extremely doubtful when you remove yourself from the understandable emotion of Syrians in particular about the toppling of Assad. And yet that's all the Western narrative and mainstream media outlets and other discourse centers are trying to push, just that singular emotion. Similar to if you go back to the first month or two in 2022, February and March, that's all you heard about when it came to Russia. No nuance, nothing like what we hear now. It was all: we have to go and defend the feisty Ukrainians and protect their democracy from this vicious dictator. And there was no attempt to rationally analyze it. That's true of every other war that I just referenced.

So just to give you a taste, here from the New York Times today, this is how they're describing it. The title in the headline: *Al-Assad toppled by Syrian rebels after a 13-year war*. "Citizens erupt in joy tempered by loss". Quote, "For nearly all the years that the al-Assad family ruled Syria, silence reigned. No one spoke freely, fearful of who might hear. Everyone knew the consequences of dissent: disappearance into government prisons, from which few ever returned. But as Saturday turned to Sunday, the first day in more than five decades that dawn broke without an al-Assad in the presidential palace, the streets were loud with joy. Non-stop celebratory gunfire crackled around Damascus, the Capitol, like so many firework displays. Crowds shouted in the squares, rebel fighters celebrated from atop their trucks. It had been 13 years since those opposed to President Bashar al-Assad first hoped to follow revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya by overthrowing their autocratic leader." Let's remember those three examples that the New York Times is telling you to think about. Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. Because we're about to cover those, where they say they too were able to overthrow their autocratic leader. "13 years of bloodshed and death, of homes and loved ones lost, of lives abandoned and ruptured. Mr. Bashar al-Assad's opponents had to wait until Sunday, years after most Syrians had given up on ever witnessing such moments at home, scenes familiar from past Arab Spring revolts were playing out with unthinkable suddenness in Damascus. State television went from trumpeting Mr. al-Assad's strong defenses on Saturday to broadcasting an announcement by a group of nine rebels on Sunday: quote, 'by the grace of God Almighty, the city of Damascus has been liberated, the tyrant Bashar al-Assad has been toppled and all the unjustly detained people from the regime's

prisons have been released', one of them read out. 'Long live a free and independent Syria for all Syrians of all sects'".

Now, if you're hearing that, if you're reading that message, if you're hearing that on television, as you undoubtedly are, if you live in the West, as you're hearing actual real Syrians expressing their genuine joy at Assad leaving, of course, you're going to be inclined to connect to that emotion. Those are real emotions and all the questions that obviously linger, why was the US so eager to drive out Assad? It probably wasn't because he's dictatorial, given how much the US loves other dictators, worse dictators, in places like Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Or the U.K. arms them. What other countries like Israel were involved? Are they actually interested in freeing and liberating the Syrian people and bringing them democracy and opportunities of plurality? Or is that what Turkey's aims are? And then who are these rebel leaders who are so triumphantly marching Damascus? What are their views about how Syria should be run? And what does that mean for the freedom and the prosperity and the dissent of the Syrian people?

Joe Biden stood up this weekend somehow, and he also read a teleprompter message prepared about the ouster of Bashar al Assad and spoke very self-praisingly and was very aggressive in disseminating this prepared speech as well. Listen to this.

Joe Biden: What happened in the Middle East after 13 years of civil war in Syria, more than half a century of brutal authoritarian rule by Bashar al-Assad and his father before him, rebel forces have forced Assad to resign his office and flee the country. We're not sure where he is, but there's word that he's in Moscow. At long last, the Assad regime has fallen. This regime brutalized and tortured and killed literally hundreds of thousands of innocent Syrians. The fall of the regime is a fundamental act of justice. It's a moment of historic opportunity for the long-suffering people of Syria to build a better future for their proud country. It's also a moment of risk and uncertainty. As we all turn to the question of what comes next, the United States will work with our partners and the stakeholders in Syria to help them seize an opportunity to manage the risks.

GG: I mean, if that sounds familiar, it's because it should. It's the exact sort of same thing that we heard after we were told that we had vanquished the Taliban from Afghanistan, the Vietcong from South Vietnam, Saddam Hussein from Iraq, Muammar Gaddafi from Libya. It's exactly the same script. Whoever the president was at the time said all of this. We vanquished the tyrant. We're so grateful to have brought freedom to the people of that country. We stand with them. This is what the United States is for and we will help them manage the aftermath to ensure that their society remains stable and free. I guess this is happening in places like Iraq and Libya and Egypt.

Here was the UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who as coincidence would have it, bad luck would have it, was forced to give a speech about the glories of freedom and battling autocracy while he was on a trip to both Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Before he went to Riyadh today, he spoke yesterday from Dubai where he was meeting with the

close US and British allies, the dictators and autocrats of the United Arab Emirates. And here's what he had to say while speaking from the bastion of freedom known as the UAE.

Keir Starmer: Well, it's very early days at the moment. We do need a political solution to this and that's what we're talking to regional allies about. It is a good thing that Assad is gone, a very good thing for the Syrian people. What we must also ensure as we go through this, the rejection of terrorism and violence and that civilians are protected, minorities are protected. That can only be through a political process. That's what we're talking to allies in the region about at the moment.

GG: So just to be clear, when he says we're talking to allies in the region about the importance of protecting the rights of religious minorities and pluralities, among the allies in the region that he's talking to about this are people like Mohammed bin Salman, the dictator of Saudi Arabia. There you see Keir Starmer with him today, because if you want to make sure that a country guarantees dissent and plurality and the rights of religious minorities, and doesn't face autocracy and repression, I know personally the first thing I would want to do is I would want to fly to Dubai, as we just showed you Keir Starmer doing there, speaking about the evils of the Assad regime while standing in front of an Emirati flag. And then I would immediately fly to Riyadh. I'd say I need to meet with the crown prince Mohammed bin Salman, I need to ensure his efforts. And what I know is, he's as dedicated as I am to ensuring that plurality reigns, that people have freedom to dissent, that religious minorities are protected. He has a very long history, a very long and noble history of devoting himself to all these values. Saudi Arabia is known around the world as the beacon of plurality and dissent and freedom. And so if you're Keir Starmer and you know it's a little bit uncomfortable that you have to stand up in the United Arab Emirates as you're there to sell weapons to the Emiratis and pledge full cooperation and support to extend the British Emirati alliance where you have to give a speech denouncing autocracy and tyranny – yeah, at least get out of there and fly to Riyadh as soon as possible, meet with Mohammed bin Salman and the rest of the Saudis because there at least it's a little bit more comfortable to do so.

Now, as I said, in the event that this sounds familiar, it's because it really should. I want to show you what was the news report that was said after the ouster of Muammar Gaddafi, which I believe we have, let me just see here. Well, let's show this first. This is a Euronews video report right after the fall of Muammar Gaddafi, which under President Obama, as he told us, we were also doing because we wanted to protect the Libyan people from violent repression and autocracy. And here is the kind of narrative that we were subjected to after we so proudly went to Libya to save the Libyans from their dictator.

Euronews: NTC forces, insert. After many weeks of fighting the former rebels celebrate their victory. But after a constant bombardment by land and air, the city lays in ruins. This ordinary drainage pipe has now taken on a greater significance as people come from miles around to see the final resting place of Colonel Gaddafi. Meanwhile people in Tripoli are also happy to see the back of the dictator. "If we caught him alive and hanged him like Saddam Hussein, we would have had another just like him. But since we killed him, just like a corpse,

this is a glorious day." With people celebrating and singing in the streets of Tripoli, people are happy in the knowledge that after 42 years, they're finally free from tyranny. The Libyan people are hoping for a quick recovery and see a bright future ahead of them.

GG: Yeah, as it turned out, the Libyan people did not have a quick road of recovery and a bright future ahead of them. They live in a country now torn by all sorts of strife, sectarian conflict, a return of slavery and anarchy in many places. It's created a crisis so severe that it produced a migrant outflow from Libya, people dying across the Mediterranean Sea, trying to get to Europe, dying in Europe or ending up in Europe, creating an immigration crisis there as well. It destroyed Libya. But it's the same exact images, the same exact narrative read over it. Look at these people. They're out celebrating. They're so grateful for us for what we've done. They're so glad to be free of their dictator.

Here was how the quote-unquote liberation of Baghdad by the United States and the UK was depicted barely a month after that war began. Here on April 9th of 2003 from TRT World, just to give you a sense, a little bit of a taste, for how that war was presented as well.

There you see a big toppling of a Saddam statue in the middle of Baghdad. It became very iconic. Who knows how many people were there? Who knows who they were, but we were told that this represented the fact that Iraqis were so grateful for our invasion, for our commitment to their freedom, because it showed how they were so happy to be rid of their dictator, just like the people of Libya were and now just like the people of Syria are. And in each of these instances, the same exact thing happens. We'll get to what happened in Egypt as well. In some ways, it was a lot worse.

So it doesn't mean that the joy of the Syrians who were repressed by Assad is illegitimate or that you should, I don't know, scorn it or lack empathy for it. It's just that if that's what you focus on, if that's what you're shown, and that's all you decide that you are going to use to understand these events, you're going to end up with an extremely incomplete and probably misguided view of how to understand these events. Historical event after historical event very similar to this one proves that there's probably not a country in the world, literally, where you would be unable to find a faction of people both inside that country and outside of the country, people who came from that country and now live elsewhere, who would celebrate if the leader of the country were deposed. Some countries might have fewer of those people, other countries might have a lot, but you can always, in any country – you can go to Ukraine right now and find people saying how they wish they were ruled by Moscow and not by Kiev. And if the media wanted to, they could just show people all day in Ukraine saying we were repressed by the Zelensky government, our fundamental rights were violated, we were told we couldn't even speak our language or practice our culture, we were in prison for it, he's a tyrant, and we're so grateful to Moscow for having entered Ukraine and protected us and are trying to fight for our rights. You could show that every single day and get Americans to think exactly the opposite if you wanted, based on those kinds of emotional pictures, but of course we never hear from the Russians speaking, ethnic Russians, in the eastern part of

Ukraine who believe that or in Crimea because that's not the narrative the media wants to present. But you could and do so with equal efficacy.

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