

When Politics Trumps Principles

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Articles & Testimony

Last month, a court sentenced a 21-year-old woman to be blinded for assaulting a man who was sexually harassing her. Taliban-style justice is alive and well in Iran. Similar atrocities occur daily in Iraq, Sudan, and the Palestinian Authority, the very regimes Europe's Left seeks to engage.

While self-described peace and human-rights activists say that dialogue and trade bring reform, the track record suggests quite the opposite: When dictators see a European olive branch, they confidently conduct business as usual. Europeans may complain of American unilateralism in the Middle East, but from a Washington perspective, the European Left's embrace of dictators and selective criticism of human-rights abuses have sacrificed all credibility.

Take Iran. In 1997, Muhammad Khatami was elected the fifth president of the Islamic Republic. European leaders, journalists, and parliamentarians immediately embraced the new "reformist." The fact that during his tenure as minister of culture Khatami banned 600 books was ignored.

Even if the chattering classes of Europe do not support others' freedom of speech, they should acknowledge a right to life. But, according to the memoirs of Supreme Leader Khomeini's chief deputy, Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, it was during Khatami's tenure as ideological guardian of the Islamic Republic that the ruling council summarily executed 3,000 prisoners deemed politically impure. Despite the blood on his hands, Khatami became a symbol of the new Iran.

In defense of engagement with the Islamic Republic, EU External Affairs Commissioner Chris Patten said, "If you don't talk to the reasonable people, you fetch up with fewer reasonable people to talk to."

Khatami can sound reasonable. Addressing the Italian parliament in March 1999, he declared: "Tolerance and exchange of views are the fruits of cultural richness, creativity, high-mindedness and harmony."

Unfortunately, Khatami's rhetoric at home was far different. In an October 2000 televised address, he declared: "In the Koran, God commanded to kill the wicked... If we abide by the Koran, all of us should mobilize to kill."

While Iranian state workers marched for unpaid wages with which to buy food, Khatami traveled to Moscow to sign a \$7 billion arms purchase. So much for people power.

The European Left's hypocrisy is most evident on capital punishment. In 1999, the EU declared abolition of the death penalty to be its top human-rights priority, a position Patten endorsed. In June 2001, the Council of Europe proposed revoking US observer status unless Washington, against its democratic will, imposed a moratorium on the death penalty. And yet, when it comes to Iran, the same Eurocrats look the other way. Under Khatami, executions have doubled in Iran. Yet it was Patten himself who argued that his proposed EU-Iran trade pact should not be directly linked to human rights.

Evidently, the bottom line triumphs over principle.

That politics trumps principle is also apparent in European attitudes toward the Palestinians. On April 15, six European Union nations endorsed the legality of terrorism in a UN Human Rights Commission vote. Austria,

Belgium, France, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden supported the resolution which approved the use of "all available means, including armed struggle" to establish a Palestinian state. Accordingly, suicide bombings are okay, since the ends justify the means.

Since Palestinian nationalism is popular among Europe's leftist elite, Israeli civilians need not enjoy fundamental human rights.

Leftist Eurocrats have not only sanctioned human-rights violations, but also funded them. Since June 2000, the EU provided 10 million euros monthly to subsidize Palestinian Authority salaries. Patten insists that "the EU [has] not seen any hard evidence that the EU funds have been misused to finance terrorism...."

And yet, former FBI analyst Matthew Levitt found that PA Chairman Yasser Arafat regularly exaggerated his needs by 30%, doctored exchange rates to net his terror fund 16 cents of every euro paid by Brussels, and even applied EU salary subsidies to fund Fatah, a group responsible for shootings and suicide bombings.

While loudly criticizing Israeli operations, the silence of Europe's human-rights elite is deafening when Palestinians kill Palestinians. Palestinians cringe when British journalists report the death of collaborators, but fail to ask why there is no trial, and what exactly "collaborator" means.

As does Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, Arafat seems to define "collaboration" as voicing public criticism. With Europe's human-rights community willing to look the other way, it is no surprise the voice of Palestinian moderates has been silenced.

The inconsistency of European activism undercuts its credibility.

Self-described progressive groups defend Saddama man directly responsible for the deaths of 182,000 Iraqi Kurds, a half million Iranians, and thousands of Kuwaitis while ignoring his victims. Saddam came to power in a coup d'etat, and yet Iraqi activists in groups like Voices in the Wilderness rush to defend his sovereignty, giving increasingly incredible explanations about why last year's contested Iraqi Kurdish elections should not matter.

They dismiss the pain inflicted on the Iraqi people by Saddam, and instead blame sanctions, ignoring the sharp decline in infant mortality under the exact same sanctions in Kurdish-administered northern Iraq.

Human-rights groups and European governments treat the Iraqi National Congress with disdain, despite its broad representation and democratic charter. Instead of supporting democracy in Iraq, European officials speak of toothless containment, or of replacing one military dictator with another.

The fallacy of Europe's Left is starkly seen in relation to Sudan.

Since 1983, Khartoum's military dictatorship has waged a violent campaign to impose Islam on the largely Christian and animist south. Two million have perished in the ensuing civil war. Not only is the EU largely silent, but it also subsidizes the Sudanese government. And yet, when Israel fought armed terrorists in Jenin, European peace activists competed to most loudly condemn a "massacre" which even the UN now acknowledges never happened.

As war looms in Iraq, the chattering classes of Europe increasingly condemn American unilateralism. Bush is a cowboy, they say, trampling basic principles of the community of nations. Perhaps such criticism would once have struck home in Washington, but increasingly it will not. European progressives have shown their rhetoric to be empty. To Americans, the European Left is no longer a guardian of human rights, but rather a symbol of hypocrisy and defender of dictators.

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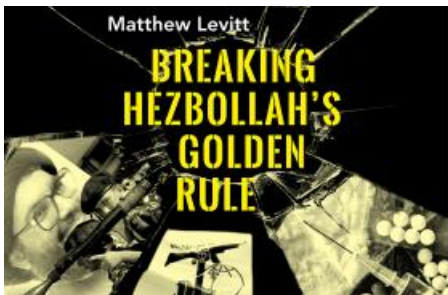
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