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Fear Extreme Islamists in the Arab World? Blame Washington

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In the last year of his life, Martin Luther King Jr. questioned US military interventions against progressive movements in the Third World by invoking a JFK quote:

"Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable."

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Were he alive to witness the last three decades of US foreign policy, King might update that quote by noting: "Those who make secular revolution impossible will make extreme Islamist revolution inevitable."

For decades beginning during the Cold War, US policy in the Islamic world has been aimed at suppressing secular reformist and leftist movements. Beginning with the CIA-engineered coup against a secular democratic reform government in Iran in 1953 (it was about oil), Washington has propped up dictators, coaching these regimes in the black arts of torture and mayhem against secular liberals and the left.

In these dictatorships, often the only places where people had freedom to meet and organize were mosques - and out of these mosques sometimes grew extreme Islamist movements. The Shah's torture state in Iran was brilliant at cleansing and murdering the left - a process that helped the rise of the Khomeini movement and ultimately Iran's Islamic Republic.

In a pattern growing out of what King called Washington's "irrational, obsessive anti-communism," US foreign policy also backed extreme Islamists over secular movements or government that were either Soviet-allied or feared to be.

In Afghanistan, beginning BEFORE the Soviet invasion and evolving into the biggest CIA covert operation of the 1980s, the US armed and trained native mujahedeen fighters - some of whom went on to form the Taliban. To aid the mujahedeen, the US recruited and brought to Afghanistan religious fanatics from the Arab world - some of whom went on to form Al Qaeda. (Like these Washington geniuses, Israeli intelligence - in a divide-and-conquer scheme aimed at combating secular leftist Palestinians - covertly funded Islamist militants in the occupied territories who we now know as Hamas.)

This is hardly obscure history.

Except in US mainstream media.

One of the mantras on US television news all day Friday was: Be fearful of the democratic uprisings against US allies in Egypt (and Tunisia and elsewhere). After all, we were told by Fox News and CNN and Chris Matthews on MSNBC, it could end up as bad as when "our ally" in Iran was overthrown and the extremists came to power in 1979.

Such talk comes easy in US media where Egyptian victims of rape and torture in Mubarak's jails are never seen. Where it's rarely emphasized that weapons of repression used against Egyptian demonstrators are paid for by US taxpayers. Where Mubarak is almost always called "president" and almost never "dictator" (unlike the elected president of Venezuela).

When US media glibly talk about the Egyptian and Tunisian "presidents" being valued "allies in the war on terror," it's no surprise that they offer no details about the prisoners the US has renditioned to these "pro-Western" countries for torture.

The truth is that no one knows how these uprisings will end.

But revolution of some kind, as King said, seems inevitable. Washington's corrupt Arab dictators will come down as surely (yet more organically) as that statue of Saddam, another former US ally.

If Washington took its heel off the Arab people and ended its embrace of the dictators, that could help secularists and democrats win hearts and minds against extreme Islamists.

Democracy is a great idea. Too bad it plays almost no role in US foreign policy.

Saturday 29 January 2011

Post-scriptum :

<http://www.truth-out.org/jeff-cohen-fear-extreme-islamists-arab-world-blame-washington67267>