

The Washington Post

Dear Moammar Gaddafi . . .

By Jim Hoagland
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Hang in there, man.

Earlier this month, I [wrote an open letter](#) urging the Egyptian president to [yield power](#) and go quietly. But Brother Colonel - as you styled yourself when I first met you in 1973 - you are no Hosni Mubarak. You [vow to go down in flames](#). Okay. That would be a fitting end for the criminal you have become.

Of course, no one should wish for more bloodshed as the price for your removal. But neither can we wish for you to get another giant plea bargain that leaves you in power. That happened in 2003, when you were welcomed into the world's leadership club after giving up development of chemical and nuclear weapons. You were forgiven the bombing of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland; the cold-blooded murder of Libyan dissident Mansour Kikhia; and a long career of other terrorist actions.

The Libyan people toppling you would solidify the important psychological transformation this year's revolutionary wave is sparking in the Arab world. It is a welcome change: Arab self-identity has for decades been rooted in defeat, bitterness and impotence born out of the military disasters of 1948 and 1967. Regimes such as yours are the products and beneficiaries of those Israeli victories. You fed on the pessimism and fatalism of people who saw themselves as history's losers.

As brave Arab patriots battle to grab control of their lives, that image can be buried. Their success would contribute mightily to the chances for finally ending the Israeli-Arab conflict - if the next generation of Arab leaders and Israel act wisely and with all deliberate speed.

Your demise will help. Your record of international criminal activity is, after all, on par with that of Saddam Hussein (who did not take my advice to get out of town in March 2003, to his ultimate regret).

We clashed in 1973 when I pressed you, at a news conference and then in a private meeting you demanded, on evidence I had of your providing help to Black September terrorists who murdered Western diplomats including Americans Cleo Noel and Curt Moore in Khartoum, Sudan. (Your denials were unconvincing.) Later encounters were no more productive.

Not long after, a Libyan embassy official I had met in Beirut urgently asked to visit me. "I can't take it anymore," he said as he walked into my apartment. "You cannot believe the evil we are asked to support." At his request, I pointed him toward a U.S. official who helped him defect. So excuse me for never having been impressed with your instincts for reform.

Yes, you helped Britain roll up Irish Republican Army terror gangs (that you had funded and supplied) and gave up other global villains in the 2003 plea bargain with Tony Blair and George W.

Bush. But your sins and crimes against your own people were not washed away by that cynical if necessary deal - and they have decided to make you pay.

The Arab awakening seems powered by generational and societal forces determined to be done with fossilized regimes, including those that came to power in the wake of Israel's swift 1967 victory - or, in Egypt's case, four years after the 1948 war - and which then justified army and thug control as necessary in a state of perpetual conflict. In the streets of Cairo, Benghazi and elsewhere, Arabs are seizing opportunities to vanquish the culture of defeat, to abandon the mentality of victimhood.

It will take much time, space and wisdom to bring about that outcome. A not-dissimilar cultural movement in the United States, France and elsewhere in 1968 did not sweep away governments. But it did change societies and attitudes irrevocably. That would be a significant advance for the Arab world now.

Already on the West Bank, Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's economic and security reforms have begun to diminish the widespread sense of victimization that has driven Palestinian (and Arab) politics for decades, if not centuries. The United States and Israel must work together urgently to help Arabs shake off the shackles of despair.

Israel has contributed to the arriving possibilities by surviving - and by forcing growing numbers of Arabs to accept that survival as a permanent reality. But Israeli leaders have also at times fostered Arab rejectionist thinking (like yours) by being insensitive, brutal or selfish, especially about settlements on the West Bank. This is a moment for Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to seize with generosity and vision, if he has it in him.

We know you didn't, brother dictator. That's one reason we are so glad to see you go.

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