

The west is losing friends who will matter after Assad

Roula Khalaf

There are two kinds of revolutionary in Syria, say the people in opposition-controlled areas of the country: those of the *fanadek* (hotels) and those of the *khanadek* (trenches). People rail at fanadek rebels, the politicians who tour the world, meeting foreign backers in five-star hotels, begging for support but often returning empty-handed. The khanadek rebels garner more respect because they fight with limited means to oust Bashar al-Assad's murderous regime, dodging bombs, missiles and, probably, chemical attacks.

The two kinds of revolutionary have never quite connected because many of the politicians in the opposition front, the western-backed Syrian National Coalition, have lived abroad for years, while the fighters and activists have been under the tyrannical rule of the Assad family. As Colonel Abdul Jabbar Akaidi, the head of the Aleppo military revolutionary council, told me a few days ago from one of his bases near Syria's border with Turkey, the hotel

rebels "live outside the reality. We live inside the reality."

More than two years into the revolt, and after 70,000 lives have been lost, 4m made homeless and more than 1m made refugees, the divide between the two kinds of rebel is widening. And the consequences of this are worrying, for Syria and its foreign backers.

Though embraced by the west, the hotel rebels have not won enough support from abroad to endear them to the people and the fighters on the ground. The trench rebels are frustrated – and part of their anger is directed at the west. They see US and European hesitance to back them with deeds, not just words, as a plot to destroy Syria.

In the town of Suran, near the Turkish border, one official told me that among the lies uttered by the Syrian dictator was an unfortunate truth – his claim of an international conspiracy. "But the conspiracy is not against him, as he says, it's against all of Syria, to break it as a nation," he said.

That the US has dithered on whether chemical weapons have been used in Syria – first playing

down British, French and Israeli claims, then admitting that there is some tentative evidence of sarin gas – will only confirm suspicions about western intentions. If the world fails to react to the use of chemical weapons, which the US has set as a red line, then what message is it sending to Mr Assad?

Once you cross the border into Syria's rebel-held areas, the disillusionment is overwhelming. In these impoverished and scarred farming communities, Syrians protest angrily at the world's apparent lack of interest. Few have heard of the money the US is giving the opposition or the extra \$123m pledged a week ago at the so-called Friends of Syria conference in Istanbul. Time and again, people ask how governments can stand by and watch the slaughter of civilians.

Ordinary people want, above all, a no-fly zone to protect them against the regime's onslaught. Those engaged in the fighting, meanwhile, want advanced weapons so they can change the balance of power on the ground in their favour. But neither has found satisfaction. And without western backing, Syria's political

opposition will lose its legitimacy. After all, it exists to lobby for outside support. If it cannot deliver, then why should anyone listen to it or believe in it? A lack of support could mean a future Syria will be more anti-western than the Assad regime. The coalition has already suffered its first big casualty: this week, Moaz al-Khatib, the former

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Damascus preacher who has been its leader, followed through with his threat to quit. His frustration is understandable, though his decision to resign is regrettable.

More popular than most other opposition figures, Mr al-Khatib was sensitive to popular sentiment, and his allies say his resignation is, at least in part, a protest against the coalition's failure to mobilise western

backing for the revolt. His last act was to attend last week's Friends of Syria conference, where the coalition issued principles that pleased western foreign ministers but for now at least, had no particular relevance to people inside Syria.

Consider, for example, the declaration's denunciation of "radical/extremist elements in Syria which follow an agenda of their own", wording designed to underline rejection of Jabhat al-Nusra, the al-Qaeda linked group that is one of the most effective forces ranged against the Assad regime. Many of the rebels are Islamists, and, though they might not share the jihadists' ideology, they consider the Damascus regime the terrorist and Nusra the ally.

"They're good guys and good fighters," says a young member of Liwaa al-Tawhid, one of the large rebel groups in the Aleppo countryside, explaining that on the battlefield all groups co-operate. Even Colonel Akaidi, the military defector now heading the Aleppo military council, says the US wants to turn people like him into the Sahwa, the tribal groups in Iraq

that were enlisted by the US to fight al-Qaeda. "If they [the US] help us so that we kill each other, then we don't want their help," he says.

Rebels and civilians in liberated areas have no understanding of the constraints on western powers, nor of the White House's anxiousness to get out of Middle East wars rather than into new ones. Nor are they convinced that Gulf states that have been providing them with some weapons have been doing so for the benefit of Syria rather than their own regional agendas.

Western aid is beginning to flow, but painfully slowly and all of it non-lethal. Evidence of sarin gas use might change the calculation and provoke an intervention. Barring that, though, the funding will alleviate some of the humanitarian suffering even as the number of victims of Mr Assad's war increases. There is, sadly, some truth in the rebels' complaint that they are getting enough assistance to continue fighting, prolonging the war, but never enough to win it and end the bloodshed.

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The master puppeteer called back to cure Rome's paralysis

Person in the news Giorgio Napolitano

The reluctant Italian president finds himself under fire for stretching his powers, says Guy Dinmore

Countless crates of books had already been transported across Rome to the apartment waiting for them. The office was cleared and an elderly couple were eagerly anticipating a long-awaited retirement, suitcases ready for a spring break on the isle of Capri.

That was last Saturday; then the calls came. Giorgio Napolitano, in the final weeks of his seven-year term as Italy's head of state, was begged by the country's squabbling political leaders to stay for a second term. This was the only solution for a parliament unable to agree on the formation of a new government, two months after inconclusive elections, or on his successor. "Fine. Do what you have to do," fumed Clio, his wife of 54 years.

As an increasingly alarmed Europe watched the implosion of the critical link in its chain of most indebted economies, Mr Napolitano with great reluctance answered the call of duty.

On Monday, the day he had planned to submit his resignation, the 87-year-old instead deployed his usual eloquence in a blistering inauguration speech to parliament, slamming its politicians for years of failure to work for the common good and for the corruption in their ranks. Break this "fatal deadlock", he ordered, choking back tears.

"It was an extraordinarily strong speech, full of threats and admonitions, the harshest words that the parties had ever heard," says Andrea Romano, newly elected MP for the centrist Civic Choice.

Almost the entire chamber rose in applause. Silvio Berlusconi was beaming. The former prime minister had been written off 18 months ago, when his paralysed, scandal-ridden centre-right government was replaced by Mario Monti's technocrats. And now the former communist head of state was commanding the splintered centre-left Democrats – heirs of his own now-defunct party – to agree on a power-sharing coalition.

"King George", as Italy's most respected and pro-European statesman is popularly known, has moved swiftly, wielding his personal authority and stretching the limits of his constitutional powers to put a government in place. On Wednesday he nominated Enrico Letta, deputy leader of the Democrats from the party's moderate Catholic wing, to form a coalition. (Last week Mr Napolitano, a devout Catholic himself, found time to write to Pope Francis – formerly another George – on their mutual saint's day. He told of his own "unwanted election".)

Barring a last-minute objection by Mr Berlusconi, Mr Letta is set to become prime minister. But there is little doubt that this will be a presidential government, giving rise to a debate about Mr Napolitano's

'The new prime minister is expert and able – but the real strongman is Napolitano'

role as master puppeteer. "Letta is expert and able but the real strongman in this government is Napolitano," says Mr Romano. "The Italian system is changing by stealth, but this needs to be formalised."

The new government is set to command the two-thirds parliamentary majority needed to change the constitution and move to a French-style system with a directly elected head of state, a move backed ardently by Mr Berlusconi. But despite being such an interventionist president, Mr Napolitano is said to be against increasing the powers of his office, preferring to see a revamping of Italy's Byzantine parliamentary system.

This week's forced intervention is Mr Napolitano's second. In late 2011, Italy's €2tn public debt was at the centre of the eurozone crisis. European leaders – in particular, Angela Merkel, German chancellor – lobbied him to press Mr Berlusconi to stop procrastinating over reforms. In Brussels, eyes turned to Mr Monti, a former European commissioner, as a replacement. But Mr Napolitano, his powers limited, could only persuade Mr Berlusconi to resign after he lost a parliamentary vote. The president duly ushered in Mr

Monti, to the fury of the left, which argued an election should have been called, despite the risk of a market collapse. A year later, however, Mr Monti showed that a prime minister is more powerful than a president, overruling Mr Napolitano's objections by resigning early to make an unsuccessful bid for election.

Achille Occhetto, known as Italy's "last communist" since dissolving the party in 1991, has been fiercely critical of Mr Napolitano. He accuses the president of overstepping his constitutional powers and, worse, creating the conditions for Mr Berlusconi's comeback and the rise of Beppe Grillo's anti-establishment Five Star Movement.

Born in 1925 in Naples, as his name suggests, Mr Napolitano joined the Communist party just after the second world war, and was elected to parliament in 1953. He remained almost continuously until 1996, moving from communism to "European socialism", as he wrote in his 2005 autobiography, full of "serious self-critical torment". His transition took two decades. In 1956 he endorsed Moscow's suppression of the Hungarian "counter-revolution" as necessary to "defend not only the military and strategic interests of the

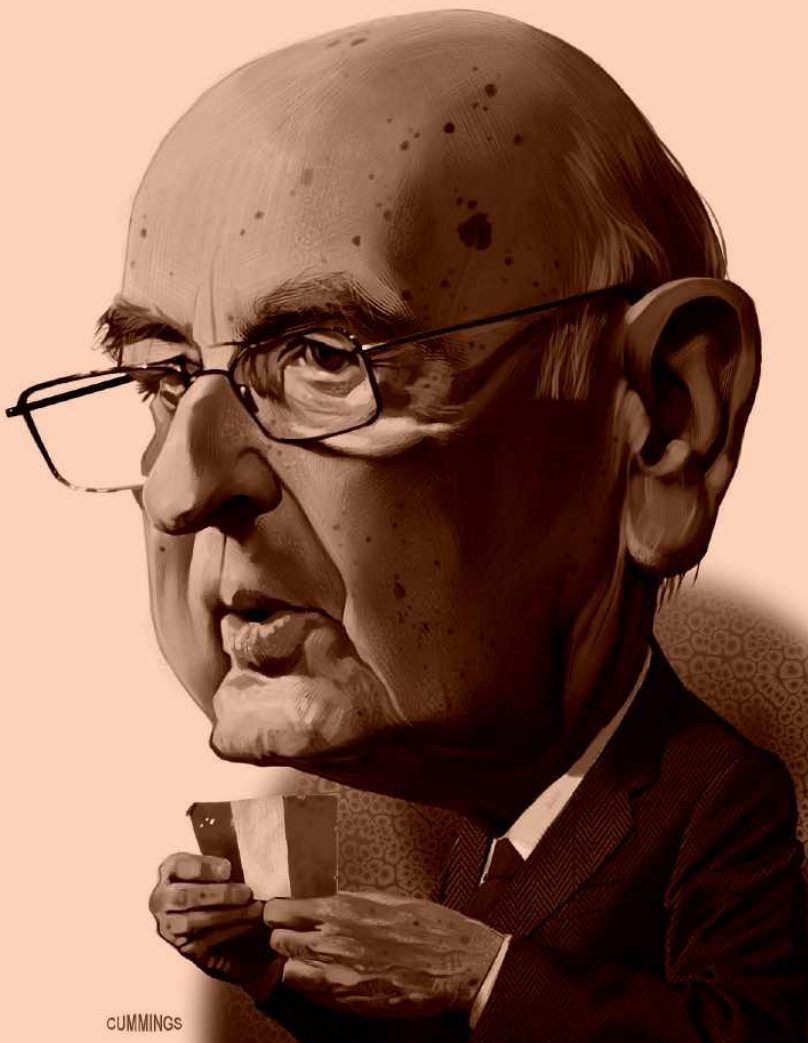
USSR but also to preserve world peace". But in 2006, on one of his first trips as head of state, he laid flowers on the grave of Imre Nagy, leader of the Hungarian uprising executed in 1958.

By 1968, Mr Napolitano was following the winds of change. He joined the party's condemnation of the Soviet suppression of the Prague spring. In the 1970s as Italy's Communists fractured, he moved to the right of the party, which espoused European integration. As Washington opened up a dialogue with Europe's largest Communist party, Mr Napolitano in 1978 became the most senior party official to visit the US, delivering lectures in his fluent English that cemented his reputation as a moderate.

Henry Kissinger, former US secretary of state, called him "my favourite communist". The president's riposte: "Your favourite former communist."

This weekend the former comrade hopes to swear in a new government. And, amid fears that an early exit by Mr Napolitano could spook markets, his retirement may still be some way off. Capri will have to wait a while.

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CUMMINGS

Immigration reform may push us back towards feudalism

Christopher Caldwell

There is an unseemly precision to the numbers that senators have been batting around in three days of immigration hearings in Washington this week. Immigrants now in the US illegally could end up waiting 13 years to become citizens. That seems a long time, since most of those without papers have already been in America for more than a decade. They would also owe a \$2,000 fine. That seems low, since over a decade it comes to roughly the cost of a speeding ticket each year.

The Senate's 844-page immigration reform bill aims to regularise migration by fixing prices for it. The value of immigrants to the US, the value of citizenship to an immigrant... these have always been discussed as wispy abstractions. Now senators are, in effect, asking: "What am I bid for this passport?"

We know there is a monetary value to western citizenship because many countries sell it outright. Some rent residency, too. You can reportedly acquire citizenship in St Kitts for \$250,000. Grenada is starting a similar scheme. Britain, the US and Canada all use offers of residency to lure investment, although in times of recession these can be a political embarrassment. Canada stopped accepting applications for its immigrant investor programme last year, pleading a bureaucratic backlog.

The best thinking about the value of citizenship in recent years has come from University of Toronto legal theorist Ayelet Shachar. Professor Shachar believes something does not add up in our present regime. First, the modern west has a presumption against inherited inequalities. Second, there are few inequalities more severe than those among citizenships: an average American earns \$30,000 a year, while a Malian makes \$2 a day. And yet we take the heritability of citizenship for granted. Hence the title of Prof Shachar's 2009 book: *The Birthright Lottery*.

Birthright citizenship reminds Prof Shachar of medieval entail, a system of rules on the inheritance of land that no individual owner could change. Among other things, this froze the social order in place. She is serious about wanting to end global inequality through a "birthright privilege levy", which would require transfers from rich to poor countries. When she notes that 97 per cent of people acquire their citizenship by being born into it, she sees evidence of a pervasive problem. Others will see evidence of common sense that can be mucked around with only at great risk to stability.

And yet Prof Shachar's

analogue of property and citizenship rights allows one to look at tired issues of immigration politics through a new lens. Her insights are impossible not to use once you have heard them. Her readers, though, may draw conclusions other than Prof Shachar's multiculturalist ones. If citizenship is indeed property, then today's immigrants to western countries are receiving a very good deal. Citizenship-till-eternity for all the descendants of a foreign-born manual labourer is an exorbitant price for a western country to pay to fill a short-term personnel gap.

Similarly, in place of *jus soli* (citizenship based on birthplace) and *jus sanguinis* (citizenship based on descent), Prof Shachar would prefer *jus nexi* (citizenship based on "the social fact of attachment"). This might improve the lives of well-assimilated immigrants who have faced legal obstacles to acquiring their full rights but it would do little for those who have not. Indeed, in Denmark, harsh immigration laws of recent years apply precisely the principle of *jus nexi* to turn away those waverers who are in the country but not of it.

In birthright citizenship, **Render citizenship shaky and we will find we are nearer old rules of belonging than we think**

Prof Shachar sees an "exception to the modern trend away from ascribed statuses in all other areas". But this is not quite true. Citizenship, historically and psychologically, has been a *substitute* for the security of these ascribed statuses. Render citizenship shaky and you will find this "trend" won't last long. You will find people scampering back to feudalism. We are closer to the old, precosmopolitan rules of belonging than we think.

In Washington this week, a report by the Economic Policy Institute, a think-tank focused on the problems of lower and middle-income workers, questioned the longstanding presumption that the US requires immigrants to make up for its trouble producing maths and science graduates. If there is a shortage in the field, the researchers asked, why are their wages not rising? Their speculation is that tech entrepreneurs prefer foreign workers because they earn less. They earn less because they have fewer rights. They have fewer rights because they lack the standing to demand them. Far from taking us out of the old world of orders, estates and status, immigration may be moving us back in that direction.

The writer is a senior editor at *The Weekly Standard*

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Gavyn Davies writes that Funding for Lending is a useful development that directly addresses the problems faced by smaller UK businesses in getting credit. It is, however, unlikely to have macroeconomic impact.