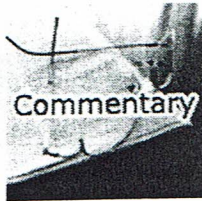


30.03.2006



WASHINGTON, DC, United States (UPI) -- Alexander Lukashenko, one of the world's great ruthless dictators, has yet again left his mark.

Before the 'caring' and watchful eyes of democratic nations, he has stolen another election. He has trounced the opposition with methods the KGB would be proud of.

Russia has, of course, congratulated him. Europe has called for sanctions. Secretary of State Rice has labeled him 'Europe's last dictator'. The United States has done too little to topple him.

Words are not enough. It is time to act now -- forcefully.

Belarus -- White Russia -- has borders with Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and the Ukraine. It is slightly smaller than Kansas and the United Kingdom (207,000 sq km). It has a population of some 10.3 million. Minsk is the capital city. Its main trading partners are Russia, the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Germany and Ukraine. Eighty percent of the economy is state-owned. A strong growth rate and decreasing inflation are propped-up and deceiving, buoyed by Russian demand for Belarus's non-competitive goods. GDP in purchasing power parity is \$7,600, compared with the United States at \$41,800.

For seven decades Belarus was a constituent Republic of the Soviet Union. In 1991 it gained independence. It maintains the closest ties with Russia of any of the former Soviet republics. And Lukashenko has dominated Belarus politics from the get-go.

I spoke to the main opposition leader, Alexander Milinkevich, in Prague in October 2005 at President Havel's Forum 2000 annual meeting. He had just been selected as the joint candidate of the opposition. The opposition hoped to have a stronger hand with one unified candidate, though they were not fools. They knew that Lukashenko would use every method to manipulate the elections -- again! Through an interpreter, I gathered he was more hopeful than convinced that the opposition would do well in the March 2006 elections -- only 5 months away. That Milinkevich had been able to travel to Prague in 2005 was a bit of a miracle itself. But Lukashenko knew exactly what he was doing. He too is no fool.

In April, Milinkevich's colleague Oleg Manaev had been prevented from joining the Prague Society and Global Panel in Bratislava, Slovakia for the 6th Transatlantic-Drift Debates. At this event a joint statement was issued condemning the Belarus government. The statement was supported by Slovakian Foreign Minister Kukan; Italian European Affairs Minister Buttiglione, Czech Defense Minister Kuhn and Polish State-Secretary Switalski; also former Foreign Ministers Boris Pankin of Russia, Barbara McDougall of Canada, Jiri Dienstbier of Czechoslovakia, Alois Mock of Austria; and former Slovak Prime Minister Jan Carnogursky, among numerous others in attendance.

Manaev had received an administrative reprimand for attending a previous event in February in Bratislava where he was accused of being 'an operative for western intelligence.' His request to attend an event in Prague in March, and the April event in Bratislava, was met with a letter announcing that he would be fired from his teaching-position immediately if he attended. That Milinkevich was able to attend the Prague Forum in October was a calculated move by Lukashenko to keep the West at abeyance and to appear to be playing a fair-hand for the March 2006 elections.

Ah, and what a fair hand it has been.

Since the March 19 elections, Milinkevich, Manaev and others have been subjected to harassment, arrests and threats of incarceration. Since the end of those Sunday elections hundreds of demonstrators have been brutally beaten and others simply thrown in jail. Students, mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers and numerous other opponents have been dragged through the streets of Minsk by the Belarusian police as though they were meat being dragged to market for their slaughter.

And the West continues to grumble about 'that awful regime'.

The United States should issue a warrant for Lukashenko's arrest. It should ask the United Nations and the European Union to do the same. Belarus should be placed under the strictest economic sanctions. Those countries that are doing business with Belarus should be told to cease and desist. They should be encouraged to remove their investments. If they do not, they should also be sanctioned.

It is simply not enough to sit idly by as Lukashenko commits crime, after crime, after crime. It is of course a shameful truth that President Putin continues to support Lukashenko in word and deed. Nonetheless, it is time to move beyond the diplomatic niceties of 'condemning in the strongest terms.' It is time to seek a policy which harms Lukashenko at the core.

It was a just policy for Israel to kidnap former Nazi murderers in countries where they were hiding. It was acceptable for France to rendition Carlos the Jackal. It is an acceptable public policy prescription for civilized nations to hunt down those who have proven again and again, that they are prepared to violate all the laws of mankind. I remember with great sense of justice President Ronald Reagan's famous clarion call in 1986, 'you can run, but you cannot hide.'

In memory to those hundreds of thousands of victims who were ruthlessly murdered by the former Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic, and for all those who have been victims of genocide, the United States, United Nations and Europe should recommit themselves to hunting down those who deserve to be brought to justice.

I recommend starting with Alexander Lukashenko.

Sometimes the ends do justify the means.

(UPI Columnist Marc S. Ellenbogen is chairman of the Global Panel Foundation and president of the Prague Society for International Cooperation. A Senior Associate at Syracuse's Maxwell School, he is based in Berlin and Prague. He can be reached at praguesociety.org and globalpanel.org)

Copyright 2006 by United Press International