



Free Press  
Viewpoint

Syria’s horror needs  
multinational reply

It was announced early Tuesday that the United States and seven other countries were expelling Syrian diplomats over the massacre in Houla, and we hope this signals that the international community is finally ready to do something to stop the horrendous civil war in Syria.

The massacre, which left more than a hundred people dead, took place Friday in Houla, a small town northwest of Homs, a city that has seen some of the worst fighting of the year-long war. Opposition leaders have said the town was shelled, and then groups of people moved through, killing 108, including women and children.

The United Nations human rights office said Tuesday that most of the victims were shot execution style at close range. Initially, the Syrian government blamed the opposition, and the opposition, of course, blamed the government. Now the U.N. is saying an investigation has revealed government tank and artillery shells in the area, but has not blamed the government outright.

The violence has continued since the massacre, with another 46 people killed around the country, including both government loyalists and opposition supporters.

Whoever is truly responsible for this human right abuse, it is time for the international community to step in and end the violence. It should be obvious to everyone by now that international condemnation isn’t going to stop Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, it is going to have to be something more forceful.

We don’t mean it should be just the United States. We have plenty of problems of our own, not to mention that a large part of our forces are still engaged in Afghanistan. The public, which has largely been calling for an end to that war, would likely not tolerate starting another. However, the United States has recently proven it can act in support of U.N. efforts without having boots on the ground.

It’s true, the international community largely stayed out of the Arab Spring rebellions. But those uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and many more never reached the level of violence that has taken place in Syria. Only one other similar example stands out, Libya.

The U.N. intervened in Libya because of the increasing level of brutality displayed by government troops against the rebels. The important thing is that the U.N. action was in support of the rebels, rather than sending in massive numbers of troops to do the fighting for them. A no-fly zone was established over the country, air strikes were conducted by the French and other European powers and the U.S. and United Kingdom struck with missiles.

Why can’t the same thing be done in Syria?

Let’s not kid ourselves. The whole reason countries like France and Italy were at all interested in helping out in Libya is because that country is in their backyards. Syria does not share that geographic interest. Besides other Arab countries, Syria borders Israel, and you can only imagine the consequences if Israel were to launch strikes on Syria. It also borders Turkey, which has been anxiously trying to get into the European Union for years, not to mention it has been fighting with Kurdish rebels on the Iraqi border, and probably isn’t eager for more.

It is going to have to be the U.N., and they are going to have to act fast if they want to stop further massacres like Houla.

– Kevin Bottrell, Goodland Star-News

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The SYRIAN BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT...

LEGISLATIVE

JUDICIAL

EXECUTE-IVE

KEVIN SIFERS CHARLOTTE OBSERVER 6/2012



Babysitting grandpa learns gymnastics

We did not eat barbecue while we were in Georgia.

We played with the baby, went shopping with the girls, went out for sandwiches, for fine dining for the eldest daughter’s birthday, and Cynthia and the girls went to book club, which claims to include dinner, but seems to me to mostly involve wine.

I don’t know much about book club. Since Lindsay was at the meeting and Brad was refereeing a soccer match, I was babysitting. And I was kinda busy.

Taylor is 2 plus two months, and she goes to a daycare/preschool place most days. She loves playing with the other kids and learning a little, and she loves to be picked up by mom. They have a routine: mom brings a sippy cup of juice and a snack, or else.

The Sunday before, we’d all spent the day at her Aunt Felicia’s pool, where she had a break-through day in the water: After more than a year of not liking water, she played in the pool all evening. We all did. We all had a great time. But that Tuesday was to be the first time I’d be left alone with Taylor.

Anyway, we picked her up and brought her home before time for book club. The girls went off, leaving me in charge, with instructions to take Taylor to gymnastics. I had juice, snacks and her ducky blanket, just in case. She whined a bit when Mom left, but then we were fine.

On the way to gymnastics – or ‘nastics, as she calls it – I realized later that I hadn’t been issued a spare diaper. That worked out OK, however.



Steve Haynes

- Along the Sappa

Gymnastics class for 2-year-olds is not for the faint of heart. It takes place in a sort of a zoo presided over by Miss Paige and a couple of teenage keepers. Every half hour or so, they get a new crop of kids, different ages and skills.

The place has trampolines, mats, pads, balance beams, all sorts of gymnastics stuff. The kids have to wait until time for their class, then run in and gather round for some stretching and games. And then they cut ‘em loose.

Miss Paige tries to work with each child during the half hour, and a few of them do walk a beam or do something with her. Most just run around and jump and do whatever they want. It’s pretty wild, but at least when I was there, no one got hurt.

Taylor did a lot of bouncing and tumbling and running. I think she liked it.

On the way home, I gave her her juice and something called a Grammy Sammy, an organic graham-cracker-yogurt-and-fruit snack. She was properly restrained in the back seat a few minutes later when I noticed the sammy was gone. I figured she’d dropped it.

“Where’s your sammy?” I asked. “Where’d it go?”

Senator’s retirement will leave a hole

Earlier this month, Indiana Republican primary voters retired six-term U.S. Sen. Richard Lugar.

Ordinarily, I don’t mind when an octogenarian senator of either party is forced into retirement. The Founding Fathers didn’t intend for elected federal office to be a lifetime job. But in the case of Sen. Lugar, I feel conflicted. It’s worth taking a look at some of the highlights from his distinguished career.

I first became familiar with Sen. Lugar while working on Capitol Hill shortly after my college graduation. One of the preeminent foreign policy issues of the day was the drive to place economic sanctions on the apartheid government in South Africa.

I was particularly sensitive to the matter, having taken an undergraduate class from Dr. Peter Walsh, one of the country’s leading African specialists at the time. Walsh had gained notoriety for his public efforts to push the Notre Dame administration to sell the university’s investments in companies that did business in South Africa.

President Ronald Reagan consistently opposed economic sanctions on South Africa, and regarded Nelson Mandela and his banned African National Congress Party as nothing more than communist sympathizers.

Lugar, who then chaired the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, led the drive to pass the Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986, which imposed economic and political sanctions on South Africa. The bill became law when Congress overrode President Reagan’s veto. Prior to the override vote, Lugar issued a memorable statement pointing out the many times he had supported the president, and then explaining why



Alan Jilka

- A Voice of Reason

he couldn’t on that occasion.

During his first trip to the United States following his release from prison, Mandela personally thanked Lugar for his work on the bill. In 2011, South African Ambassador to the U.S. Ebrahim Rasool presented Lugar with the Mandela Freedom Award for his “exceptional contribution to the struggle for the attainment of a nonracial, free and democratic South Africa.”

Other highlights of his career are testaments to his ability and willingness to work across party lines. The Cooperative Threat Reduction Program (1992) established by a bill which came to be known as Nunn-Lugar, was the first post-Cold War measure that dealt with the need to control and reduce stockpiles of nuclear weapons. His Democratic partner, former Georgia Sen. Sam Nunn, issued a statement following Lugar’s defeat saying “There is no doubt that the world is a safer place thanks to Dick Lugar.”

Other more recent examples of Lugar’s willingness to work across the aisle include his support for auto bailouts and the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty that passed the Senate in December 2010. It would be hard to argue that he frequently betrayed his conservative principals. The American Conservative Union

gives him a 77 percent lifetime voting record.

Lugar’s primary opponent, and Tea Party favorite, State Treasurer Richard Mourdock turned the senator’s statesmanlike demeanor, friendship with President Obama and willingness to seek bi-partisan compromises into political liabilities.

After the primary results came in many commented on Lugar’s remarkable career. Former Nebraska Republican Sen. Chuck Hagel, who served with him for 12 years in the Senate, was effusive in his praise.

“There is not one senator in the Republican Party today who is in Dick Lugar’s universe...,” Hagel said. “He’s the kind of public servant and elected official the country expects and deserves.”

Sen. Lugar made a gracious concession speech, but later issued a more pointed statement regarding his opponent. He said he hoped Mourdock would prove to be a good senator, but went on to say that to do so “will require him to revise his stated goal of bringing more partisanship to Washington.”

I’m not in a position to give advice to residents of the Hoosier state for the upcoming general election. But surely a majority of Indiana voters don’t agree with Mourdock that the answer to Washington’s problems is more partisanship.

Alan Jilka is a former Salina city commissioner and mayor. He was the Democratic nominee for Congress in the 1st District in 2010.

Mallard  
Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

