HOW TO GET RID OF A DICTATOR

EDITO



The ancient Greeks used the term Kairos to describe the opportune moment, the *"right time,"* the decisive instant when an action must be taken.

On June 24, 2023, fortifications were erected on the outskirts of Moscow in response to the march toward the capital by Prigozhin's Wagner forces. The world held its breath, watching what seemed like the possible last moments of a dictator. Today, Prigozhin is dead, while Putin remains in the Kremlin, even welcomed with a red carpet by the U.S. President in Alaska.

Elsewhere, however, dictators such as Ben Ali in Tunisia, Nicolae Ceaușescu in Romania, Blaise Compaoré in Burkina Faso, and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt were removed from office by their own people; led by courageous figures capable of organizing, uniting, and mobilizing in ways that shifted the balance of power.

What determines whether a tyrant clings to power or is finally cast out?

As outlined by Marcel Dirsus in The Guardian, *"to stay in power, tyrants must keep the people with the money, the elites, and the men with guns, the generals, on side (...) Paying off elites and buying the loyalty of generals is expensive and often requires strategies that alienate the rest of the population."* Hence, *"any broad sanctions that deprive the tyrant of opportunities to redistribute money to elites and generals, and measures that make it harder to access weaponry that can be used to suppress protesters or surveillance software to control opponents"* contribute to weakening the regime.

More importantly, *"Tunisians and Romanians understood something crucial: to get rid of a dictator, you need to split the regime. When the streets are full of people and the tyrant issues an order to open fire, the loyalists have a decision to make: will they follow through and kill their own, or will they refuse?"*

Every action taken before, during, and after that crucial Kairos like credible threats of sanctions, the possibility of a safe exit, the promise of an inclusive post-regime transition government, etc. can be decisive.

These factors can determine whether the finger pulls the trigger, tipping the balance between a bloodbath and the dawn of a peaceful democratic transition.

The fall of a dictator however, often the result of long, sustained, and courageous struggle, is only the beginning of democracy's most critical process.

Looking at Egypt or Burkina Faso a decade after their dictators fell, the question raised by the article leads us to its logical next step: how do we not only remove a dictator, but ensure that his downfall gives rise to genuine a pluralistic democracy where freedom of opinion, justice, and a free press function as real counterweights to power.

What priorities must a transitional government embrace to ensure that the sacrifices of those who fought for freedom truly matter?