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Middle East

# The revolutionary processes caught in the grip of reactionary forces

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**It's been almost four years since the beginning of the revolutionary processes in the Middle East and North Africa, and although these processes are far from completed, their initial objectives (democracy, social justice, and equality) never seemed more distant.**

The two major forces, which have distinguished themselves and have dominated for some time the political scene in the region, are the representatives of the former authoritarian regimes on one side and the Islamic fundamentalist and reactionary forces in its various components from the Muslim Brotherhood to the Jihadists on the other side. These forces are of course not completely similar and major differences exist between them, but they share a common counter revolutionary position against the popular movements and the objectives of the revolution. In Tunisia, for example, the organisation that won the last October parliamentary elections are gathered under the umbrella of Nidaa Tunes, which represents the interests of the former regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali, followed by the reactionary Islamic force of En-Nahda.

The return or the consolidation of the power of the representatives of the former authoritarian regimes is not limited to Tunisia only, but is a regional phenomenon.

In Egypt, former dictator Hosni Mubarak has been cleared of the two charges held against him: corruption and above all its role in the repression and the death of more than 850 demonstrators during the 18 days of the popular uprising that led to his overthrow in February 2011. Mubarak's sons, Alaa and Gamal, accused of having embezzled or facilitated the diversion of more than 125 million Egyptian pounds (about 14 million euros), have also been cleared. The charges against seven senior security officials, including former Interior Minister Mubarak Habib al-Adly, were also abandoned.

As a reminder, since the arrival to power of Sissi, at least 1400 supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood have been assassinated, and more than 15000 supporters or sympathisers of this organisation have been imprisoned. I have already talked and mentioned the counter revolutionary role of the Muslim Brotherhood in the past, but this does not prevent us from condemning the exactions and crimes of the regime of Sissi against the members of the Muslim Brotherhood, as they constitute violations of basic democratic rights. To stay silent in front of these crimes is to give a free pass to the counter-revolution in its repression and betray basic fundamental principles of defence of democratic rights. The regime of Sissi also attacked the liberal and left opposition, arresting numerous activists, including for having 'violated' a controversial law that limits the right to demonstrate, in opposition with international human rights standards. Some human rights activists have also been imprisoned or forced to leave the country.

The counter revolution represented by the regime of Sissi is still advancing forward, with the resolute support of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Monarchies, and now even Qatar. This latter, former supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and that still welcomes representatives of the organisation, has expressed its support to the regime of Sissi on December 9 2014 following the pressures of the various Gulf monarchies in the framework of the conference of the Gulf Council of Cooperation.

Sissi's regime seeks to rehabilitate the former authoritarian regime of Mubarak and co in continuing the same policies. At the same time, the movement of the Muslim Brotherhood, which has been and is severely repressed, has not made a deep self-criticism of its period in power and of its authoritarian policies and counter revolutionary practices. Since the overthrow of Morsi, the movement has even strengthened its aggressive religious sectarian discourse against the Christian Coptic minority, in accusing it to be responsible of all kinds of conspiracies and to be the main responsible of the overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood, all the while refusing to support the social

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demands and the numerous workers strikes repressed by the current regime. The only slogan of the Muslim Brotherhood is not the objectives of the revolution, but only the return of Morsi.

In the case of Syria, while in the past the solution of an authoritarian regime without Assad and with some sections of the Syrian opposition (liberals and Muslim Brotherhood) close to the West and the Gulf monarchies but not representative of the Syrian revolutionaries was favoured by the various international and regional imperialist forces, today these latter forces agree to say that Assad could finally stay and be an ally in the so called "war against terrorism". The Assad regime would therefore be cleared of all its crimes and the destructions caused by its armed forces and local and foreign militias for the defence of the regime.

We can also notice that the intervention in Syria of the West, led by the USA and with the collaboration of some Gulf monarchies, did not have much effect and did not prevent the progresses on the field by the jihadist forces, particularly of the Islamic State and Jabhat al Nusra (the Al Qaida branch in Syria) against the Syrian revolutionaries and the regions under the domination of the Kurdish forces of the PYD in Syria. Similarly, there is still a refusal by the various so-called "friends" of the Syrian revolution to help politically and support militarily the democratic and popular forces in Syria, including the Free Syrian Army and the Kurdish groups of the PYD, which fought and are fighting the Assad regime and the reactionary Islamic forces.

It should be remembered that it is these two actors, the democratic components of the FSA and the PYD, in addition to the Syrian popular movement that first struggled against the expansion of the reactionary jihadists and Islamic reactionary forces in Syria. They are the ones who have paid a heavy price to the tyranny of these groups, while the Assad regime was allowing and abetting their expansion and focused its repression against the democratic and progressive popular forces, civilians and armed, in the country.

In Tunisia, as we mentioned earlier, Nidaa Tunes, the representatives of the interests of the former regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali, and En-Nahda, the Islamic reactionary movement that was in power since October 2011 with two other political forces, were the two most important forces in the legislative election of October. Nidaa Tunis appears as the most attractive choice in the eyes of the Tunisian Bosses' Union, western foreign embassies and international financial institutions.

On its side, En-Nahda has worked to maintain and continue the ultra-liberal economic and social policies of the Ben Ali era. En-Nahda has also engaged itself with an important zeal to fulfil the commitments of Tunisia to the European Union and the international financial institutions like the IMF and the WB to be granted new loans exceeding billions of euros. Meanwhile, combative trade unions and the demands of the workers have been deemed excessive, including at the level of the General Union of Tunisian Workers (known as the UGTT), according to Rachid Ghannouchi, head of the En-Nahda Movement, in an interview in July 2014. Moreover he accused the UGTT of being a legacy of France and that this institution is not a priori a natural institution of the "Muslim city".

The arrival to power of En-Nahda did not stop the violence against political opponents, as exemplified by the various political assassinations that took place under their watch. Besides, this violence against political opponents has also been seen through the militias called the "Leagues of the Protection of the Revolution" (LPR) considered to be controlled by En-Nahda. Numerous attacks have been led par the LPR and salafist groups against different political groups and activists, including against political meetings of the Popular Front and its members and other activists and associations (including artists prevented to perform for "violating Islamic principles"). This is without also forgetting that on December 4, 2012, the day of the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the assassination of the leader and founder of the Tunisian trade union movement Farhat Hached, the LPR attacked the headquarters of the UGTT in Tunis with sticks, knives, gas bombs, causing more than a dozen injured.

The violence of the militias has also been accompanied by a hardening of the State repression against political

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activists and particularly against many trade unionists arrested several times because of their trade union activities.

Before having to leave power, the Troika, in other words En-Nahda and its allies, voted an austerity budget and anti-social policies. The new fiscal policies, that were openly disadvantageous to the working and popular classes, have been the detonator of a broad protest movement, causing not only the end of these measures, but also led to the resignation of the Prime Minister, Ali Laarayedh, member of En-Nahda.

The opposition that take place between representatives of the former regimes and reactionary and fundamentalist Islamic forces have been observed in the legislative Tunisian elections or in the repression of the members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt by the regime of Sissi. This does not mean that the clashes between these two forces have not given way to alliances and collaborations at some points. It is indeed necessary to remember that the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt after the fall of Mubarak has maintained good relations and even worked with the leaders of the army until the fall of Morsi in July 2013. They have not hesitated to praise the role of the army as “protector of the nation and the revolution” several times before the overthrow of Morsi. In addition, when the Muslim Brotherhood dominated the parliament and occupied the presidency, they have not challenged the political and economic power of the army, as they did not condemn the army’ repressive role against the Egyptian people’s movement for example, during the 18 days of the uprising in 2011 or during Maspero’s crimes in November 2011 against the Egyptian Coptic demonstrators.

In Tunisia, Nidaa Tunes and En-Nahda have also collaborated on numerous occasions in the past and have not hidden their intentions to do so in the future. In an interview in October 2014, Rachid Ghannouchi did not exclude the possibility of working with Nidaa Tunes and added that it was En-Nahda that prevented the adoption of the law of immunization of the revolution allowing people that belonged to the former regime to stand for elections. Following the victory of Nidaa Tunes at the legislative elections, the vice president of En-Nahda, Abdelfattah Mourou, declared that he was not against En-Nahda’s participation in the next government. The leader of the movement of Nidaa Tunes and candidate for the Presidency of the Republic, Beji CaÃed Essebsi, has also indicated that the En-Nahda movement wasn’t not an enemy and he even said that if the supreme interest of the State requires it, Nidaa will not hesitate to form a front with En-Nahda and that this can’t be considered a betrayal for those who voted in the parliamentary elections for Nidaa.

During the first sessions of parliament, this collaboration was also noticed. The only vote taken on December 2 involved a suspension of session of 48-hours, to allow more time for Nidaa and En-Nahda to negotiate among themselves and / or recuperate each of their allies. The Popular Front was the only parliamentary group to oppose this vote and was joined only by independent members. At the second meeting on December 4 Nidaa and En-Nahda again voted together for the three posts to fulfil in parliament.

Besides as a reminder, the business baron and supporter of En-Nahda Frikha Mohammed stated that the UTICA (association of employers in Tunisia) proposed to the different parties, including En-Nahda, to integrate businessmen in their list and added that there is some consensus on economic policies between En-Nahda, Nidaa Tunis, and others like Afek (ultra liberal party).

In conclusion, these two actors, representatives of the former authoritarian regimes on one side and the reactionary and fundamentalist Islamic forces, are enemies of the initial objectives of the revolutionary processes. Popular movements, activists and groups that were and are carrying the original objectives of the revolutionary process have been attacked by these two forces. The representatives of the former authoritarian regimes and the reactionary and fundamentalist Islamic forces are two forces of the counter-revolution and this despite a different political propaganda. The representatives of the former regimes present themselves as the defenders of modernism, as the saviour of the unity of the nation and champion of the fight against “terrorism”. The reactionary and fundamentalist Islamic forces present themselves on its side as the guarantor of the Islamic religion, morality, authenticity of Islamic

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and Arab identity, while making the link with the Islamic “Umma”.

These two discourses that certainly differ in appearance, should not make us forget that these two movements share a very similar political project: the will to limit and suppress democratic and social rights, while seeking to guarantee the capitalist system of production and continue the neoliberal policies that impoverish the popular classes in the region. Similarly these two counter revolutionary forces will not hesitate to use a political discourse seeking to divide and antagonize the working popular classes on sectarian religious, ethnic, gender, regionalist bases, etc ...

For those who choose to support one of these two counter revolutionary forces presenting it as the choice of the “least worst”, they actually choose the road of defeat and the maintenance of an unjust system in which the popular classes in the region live. The role of revolutionaries is not to choose between different factions of the bourgeoisie or different factions of the counter-revolutions that are supported by various international and sub-regional imperialist actors. Our role is to oppose the different counter revolutionary forces and build an independent front from these two forms of reactions and basing it on democratic, social, anti-imperialist basis and opposing all forms of discrimination and working for the radical change of society in a dynamic from below in which the working classes the agent of change.

In conclusion, given the clashes or collaboration between the forces of reaction, let's not choose one form of the reaction, but support, build and organize a popular and radical alternative for the original objectives of the revolutions: democracy social justice and equality.

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