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Arab region

# Counterrevolutionaries on the march

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**Since the Arab Spring revolutions threatened the status quo in the Middle East, tyrants, sympathisers and extremists have attempted to pull back the gains the people made.**

With the Saudi military airstrike against Yemen, in active cooperation with its US, European, and regional allies, the counterrevolutionary forces mobilised against the aspirations of Arab revolutions are now in full gear and require a quick assessment.

This invasion is the thematic finale of a successful counterrevolutionary mobilisation by a transnational coalition of entrenched forces trying to put an end to Arab revolutions.

## Mercenary army

Joining the ranks of reactionary ruling Arab regimes is the mercenary army of Pakistan now put squarely at the service of safeguarding intransigent potentates.

Pakistan has a long history in such services, against the will of the Pakistani people. According to a recent analysis: "Dating back to the 1960s, Pakistan's experienced military helped train the undermanned and underprepared militaries of a number of fledgling Arab states. The former Pakistani President Zia-ul-Haq once even commanded a unit of troops in Jordan tasked with combating Palestinian fighters."

We may not be able to reverse that reactionary course but we must read and record it accurately. Fresh out of a military coup against a democratically elected government, Generalissimo Abdel Fattah al-Sisi promises to send a military force into Yemen, in support of the Saudi invasion of a sovereign nation-state, you know the nastiest forces of the counterrevolution mean business.

The Saudi military strike against Yemen is symptomatic of the larger frame of counterrevolutionary forces. According to reports, "Saudi Arabia . . . begun military operations in Yemen, launching airstrikes in coordination with a coalition of ten nations. The strikes came as Yemen was hurtling closer to civil war after months of turmoil, as fighters and army units allied with the Houthi movement threatened to overrun the southern port of Aden where the besieged president, Abdrabbo Mansour Hadi, has gone into hiding."

These are not "ten nations" - these are ten ruling regimes that those nations meant to overthrow when they were crying for the whole world to hear: "People Demand the Overthrow of the Regime." Changing the political parlance of our realities is what the counterrevolution seeks to achieve. We must not yield.

A significant minority of Yemenis are Zaydi Shias, manhandled by the Saudis to the point that under the leadership of Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi they were radicalised with the active patronage of the Islamic Republic of Iran for its own regional hegemony.

The Saudis and Iranians are fighting a proxy war in Yemen for the same strategic and regional advantages that have seen them faceoff in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.

But that does not change the historical fact that when millions of Yemenis poured into their streets and launched their revolution an entirely different political vision was at work than the one the Saudis and the ruling regime in Iran now wishes to register and routinise.

The ruling interests in Saudi Arabia and Iran are adversaries in their hegemonic claims over the region, but identical in their mutual intentions to derail Arab revolutions to their advantage. In order to see this, we need to come closer to understanding the Saudi invasion from a larger frame of reference.

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The Saudi air strikes against Yemen is not the first time the backward potentate flexes its military muscles to dominate the region to its retrograde advantage and change the historic course of Arab revolutions.

Exactly four years ago, in March 2011, soon after the commencement of the Arab revolutions, the Saudis launched yet another military strike against Bahrain (aided and abetted by the British) to quell its revolutionary aspirations.

At that time, everyone saw the military invasion as launched decidedly against the revolutionary aspiration of Bahrainis.

But today, the Saudi-Iranians sectarianism and power mongering has succeeded in putting a different spin on the military strikes. It is imperative that we see the March 2011 invasion of Bahrain and March 2015 invasion of Yemen as indications of one and the same counterrevolutionary momentum.

## Proxy war

The Saudi militarism (fully endorsed by its regional, European and US allies) cannot be assessed in isolation.

There are other, equally pernicious, counterrevolutionary forces at work for the last four years that require equal attention, without which the Saudi-generated narrative will dominate the politics of their adventurism and distort the historic course of Arab revolutions in their darkest moments.

Who and what are these counterrevolutionary forces that have come together to frame and occasion the Saudi militarism? We may identify at least four particularly powerful and pestiferous factors.

First and foremost: Arab revolutions have endangered the US imperial domination of the region and all its active and passive allies, ranging from its European and Israeli partners to countries extending from Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Turkey to Sisi's Egypt and beyond.

President Obama and President Erdogan may have paid lip service to the will of the Arab people at the commencement of the revolutions, and the ruling clergy in Iran certainly sought to put an Islamist spin on it.

But all of these interests were simultaneously endangered by the Arab uprisings that were geared to alter the very political DNA of the region, endangering the racist apartheid of Israel with the same measure that released the Kurdish revolutionary aspirations on the model of Kobani.

Israel is integral to this counterrevolutionary syndrome. Netanyahu would not have dared to bomb Gaza and murder more Palestinians in July 2014 were it not for Sisi's military coup in Egypt exactly a year earlier in July 2013. Neither Sisi's coup in Egypt nor Netanyahu's mayhem in Gaza could have happened without US knowledge and approval.

Second and most ferociously come the murderous machinations of the Islamic State group (IS, formerly known as ISIS), al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, etc. These are the most bloodthirsty counterrevolutionary forces throwing a monkey wrench at the civic and entirely non-violent course of the Arab revolutions.

Each one of these militant bands of thugs and armed robbers has slightly different genealogy. But by far the most potent counterrevolutionary force among them is IS: born out of a number of conflating factors, including the US-led invasion of Iraq and the process of de-Baathification it initiated, Bashar al-Assad's cruel repression of the peaceful Syrian uprising, the Iranian intervention in Iraq and Syria that in conjunction with the Saudi-led resentment injected a militant sectarianism in the region.

And the Israeli intervention to fish in the muddy water that has resulted in stealing more of Palestine and murder more Palestinians. IS is the epitome of counterrevolutionary forces turning the cause and course of counterrevolutionary forces into a "war on terror".

Third: the active rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran for regional domination, which has turned an otherwise entirely non-sectarian, decidedly cosmopolitan revolutionary environment into viciously sectarian hostility.

Here the Iranian domination of the Iraqi, Syrian, and Lebanese scene is much a counterrevolutionary culprit as is the Saudi massive funding of militant thugs to resist an up the ante against the Iranian influence.

The very introduction of Shia-Sunni factors in these revolutions is the direct result of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry for regional hegemony, and has absolutely nothing to do with two mutually complementary branches of Islam.

The ludicrous assumption and repeated utterance that Iran is "the leader of the Shia world" and Saudi Arabia "the leader of the Sunni world" categorically distort the reality of our lived experiences.

No one died and made the tyrannical Islamic Republic or the reactionary tribalism of a Saudi family the leader of anything or anybody. A plague on both their ruling houses has been the cry of freedom of Iranians and Arabs from the Green Movement to the Arab Spring.

Fourth: No tallying of the counterrevolutionary forces actively working and writing against the ideals and aspirations of Arab and Muslim revolutions is complete without the inclusion of a particularly noisy, racist, morally corrupt, and intellectually bankrupt segments of the European and American "left" that from day one has been aggressive in its advocacy of murderous tyrants like Bashar al-Assad or Muammar Qaddafi.

This small gang of irredeemably illiterate and pathologically immoral busybodies with a ludicrous claim of being "left" has no principled investment in these revolutions and has been consistently writing in active support of tyrannical monstrosities like Bashar al-Assad in the guise of an inept, clumsy, and sophomoric reading of imperialism they have regurgitated since their high school years — thus incapable of forming a single sentence with multiple subordinate clauses that opposes imperialism and defies tyranny at one and the same time.

In their illiteracy, incompetence and immorality they are particularly angry at those among the Arab and Muslim left (the real left) that have left them behind in their critical thinking and have nothing for these racists but contempt.

The only good Arab or Muslim for these racist white-supremacist, bastardised "leftists" are the dead Arab and Muslim left "tortured, murdered, and burned alive in the dungeons of their favourite tyrants in Syria and elsewhere.

If an Arab or Muslim who identifies as left has a voice, a vision, a critical imagination that is beyond their pathetic reach and refuses to play second to their broken violin, she or he robs them the wrong way and puts them out of their business.

In their despicable white-supremacist racism they hallucinate that with a mere high school diploma or half-baked college education or through their pathetic monolingual myopia they can teach leading Arab and Muslim thinkers the meaning of imperialism (the sheer obscenity of the assumption boggles the mind), thinking them infants incapable of charting the course of their own critical thinking and world-historic events.

They are as detestable in their racism as the tyrants they support are in their murderous repressions.

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## Clearing the path ahead

On the surface the current counterrevolutionary mobilisations may be confusing: the US is helping the Saudis in Yemen to fight the Iran-backed Shia Houthis, while in Iraq it helps Iranian-backed Shia fight IS. But it is not.

The ruling interests in the US, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel, et al have a single common interest: to thwart and derail the Arab and Muslim revolutions and drag them into perpetual sectarian infighting.

If we allow for the discourse to be determined by the rapidly changing headlines we will lose sight of the historic moment. The Saudi-Iranian regional rivalry is one nasty piece of a smokescreen blinding the sight. We must see through the charade.

Saudi Arabia has launched this attack on Yemen to throw a monkey wrench at the US nuclear deal with Iran, and in this the retrograde kingdom and its allies are in solid solidarity with Israel.

Consider these critical dates: Netanyahu's speech at the US Congress on 3 March, the letter 47 Republican senators sent to Iran on 9 March, and the Saudi-led airstrike against Yemen on 25 March are all integral to a nasty counterrevolutionary force, not just to torpedo the looming deadline of the US-Iran nuclear deal by 31 March, but far more importantly to change the revolutionary dynamics of the Arab world towards regional conflicts and sectarianism.

The times we are living between the rise of Arab revolutions in 2010 and today in spring of 2015 is reminiscent of the time Europe experienced between the rise of the Spring of Nations during the revolutions of 1848, when Marx wrote his *The Communist Manifesto* and the rise of the counterrevolutionary tides that culminated in Marx writing *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* in 1852.

As early as 1850 Marx had come to the conclusion that the revolutionary momentum had come to an end. "The development of the revolution," as David Fernbach summarises Marx's disposition at this interval in his Introduction to the Penguin edition of Marx's *Political Writings* (1973), "which had earlier seemed a matter of a few years, had now to be counted in decades."

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The circumstances of global capitalism and its episodic crisis are vastly different today than it was at Marx's time, as are the treacheries of the counterrevolutionary forces, and therefore perforce must be our very notion of "revolution" and its open-ended possibilities.

The lesson we learn from Marx's visionary assessment of the events before and after the 1848 revolutions in Europe is that he remained steadfast in his determination and commitment to the cause of the revolution.

IS and al-Qaeda gangs roaming in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen and the pro-mass murderers, racist European and US "left" clamouring on the internet come together and bookend and bracket counterrevolutionary forces in the region and beyond.

They share one single mission: to deny and derail the legitimate cause and course of these revolutions.

In between them, the real military forces of the region, ranging from the US and its allies to the sectarian power-mongering of Iran and Saudi Arabia, form an unholy alliance to change the very discourse and dynamics of daily politics in the region.

They succeed to bomb and destroy their ways into the daily headlines. The singular mission of revolutionary thinkers of this time is to dismantle that mission and keep the ideals and aspirations of our democratic future alive.

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