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## US geostrategic plan in trouble

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*'The revolution has not changed the regime, but it changed the people'*  
(written on the walls of Cairo)

Since the first edition of my book *The People's Spring, the future of the Arab revolutions* (September 2011) a lot of water has flowed under the bridges in Cairo, which I have to take into account. As an observer and actor on the Egyptian political scene, I also felt the need to publish in Arabic in Cairo an update of my first analysis of the ongoing 'revolution'. A book with the title *The Egyptian revolution after June 30* was released in September 2013 in the aftermath of the Sissi triumph. I also published some fifty articles and interviews, mostly in Arabic, French and subsequently in English, between Summer 2011 and Spring 2015.

It is useful to recap for the reader the highlights of events that punctuated this story from January 25, 2011 when 15 million protesters demanded the departure of Mubarak, demands that the Muslim Brotherhood condemned:

- *28 January 2011*: Mass escape from the Cairo prison of the Muslim Brotherhood and common criminals released by Hamas militia (the Muslim Brotherhood that govern Gaza) that had penetrated Egypt illegally.
- *11 February 2011*: Mubarak's abdication in favor of the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) headed by Marshal Tantawi.
- *March 2011*: reform of the constitution drafted by a group of lawyers appointed by SCAF, all close to the Muslim Brotherhood, adopted in haste by referendum.
- *October / November 2011*: Parliamentary elections won by the Muslim Brotherhood (50% of the votes) and the Salafis (25%).
- *April 2012*: Invalidation of parliamentary elections by the Constitutional Court on account of massive fraud.
- *June 2012*: Presidential elections whose early date was decided by Marshal Tantawi with the agreement of the Ambassador of the United States (Anne Patterson), and after the release of Khairat el Shater (the *de facto* supreme leader of the Muslim Brotherhood). Four to five million votes going to each of the four major candidates: two Muslim Brotherhood people, including Morsi, Hamdin Sabbahi (Nasserite), and General Shafiq (former Minister of Mubarak). In the second round Morsi overpowered Shafiq. At least, this is what the US Embassy was quick to declare even before the Constitutional Council has given its ruling.
- *December 2012 and following weeks*: Repeated coups by Morsi who makes arbitrary changes to the Constitution, establishes a 'Legislative Council' consisting almost exclusively of the Muslim Brotherhood, appoints the members of a committee (also all Muslim Brothers) to prepare a draft 'Islamic constitution'.

- *June 30, 2013*: Huge demonstration against Morsi and the government of the Muslim Brotherhood (30 million participants).
- *July 3, 2013*: Abdel Fattah el Sissi, who succeeded Tantawi (who had been retired by SCAF), dismisses Morsi, dissolves the Legislative Council and cancels the proposed Islamic Constitution.
- *December 2013*: the Muslim Brotherhood are banned and declared to be a ‘terrorist organization’.
- *4 January 2014*: Second constitutional referendum, the constitution was approved with 98% of votes.
- *May / June 2014*: Presidential elections: Sissi won with over 95% of the votes cast against his rival Sabbahi.
- *March 2015*: Major international economic conference in Sharm el Sheikh with the goal: to obtain foreign financial contributions for the great Egyptian projects (doubling the Suez Canal, oil and gas exploitation).

Of course I will return repeatedly in this text to these electoral farces, to the unflinching support provided by the United States to their preferential ally (the Muslim Brotherhood), and to the acts of fascist gangsterism practiced by Morsi and his cronies while in government for a year, a decisive factor in their fall.

### **The single-mindedness of the media on Egypt**

Since 2011, international information about Egypt has consistently been mostly misinformation. Some facts are blown up (a few hundred Muslim Brotherhood demonstrators are presented as a huge show of force), others hidden (such as the signature campaign demanding the resignation of President Morsi with twenty-five million signatures collected, is never mentioned). But beyond the selection of ‘facts’, there is misinformation about the situation analysis and about the definition of challenges. The media clergy, serving the financial aristocracy of NATO and its Gulf allies (especially the media chain *El Djazireh*), dominate the scene. The discourse reproduces ad nauseam the same song:

- That the concepts and ambitions of nationalism — Nasserite in this case — and of communism all come from a past irrevocably gone, the days of the Cold War,
- Electoral democracy and adjusting to the demands of liberal globalization are the only realistic ways forward, the only bearers of possible progress,
- People, especially those from Muslim countries, have always given, and give now more than ever, a priority to the expression of their identity with their religious beliefs,
- Thus the only ‘mass movement’ that exists in Egypt and in many other countries, is represented by the Islamic current,
- This Islamic current is plural and differentiated and is not inherently incompatible with democracy,
- The Muslim Brotherhood especially in Egypt are able to convert to democracy,
- Egypt has been governed since 1952 (for 70 years) by military dictatorships,

- The first free election in Egypt was carried out by civilians — the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists having a strong majority in Parliament and in the Presidency,
- President-elect Morsi was overthrown by a military coup on July 3, 2013,
- The only acceptable way out of chaos and avert the threat of ‘civil war’ demands the return to power of the elected civilian president.

Each of these statements is contrary to what any serious analysis of the history and current events in Egypt and elsewhere in the world would conclude. There is therefore no ‘objective information’ nor ‘realistic analysis’ but simply poisoning propaganda by the current major powers: the international financial capital and the policy instruments at its sole devotion.

### **Conspiracy or imperialist conquest strategy?**

The widespread explosion of popular anger in Tunisia and Egypt in 2010 and 2011 was predictable. There were strong warning signs — the Gafsa miners strikes in Tunisia, the repeated strikes in Egypt, the first daring demonstration in Cairo Kefaya — announced that the explosion was imminent. The explosion nevertheless surprised the prevailing consensus, with the exception of a few individuals and perhaps the embryos of potentially radical parties. It certainly also surprised the dominant powers and their sponsors (the CIA amongst others). These two popular movements expressed themselves through huge peaceful demonstrations, largely spontaneous and involving a broad range of social forces whose anger and motives were therefore many and varied, even if they could be potentially broadly convergent. The diversity of the components of the general movement of anger, the fragmentation of the claims (democratic rights, social justice) and the absence, or extreme weakness, of their organizations, are the obvious reasons for the reduction of their claims at this stage to one specific aim: to expel Ben Ali and Mubarak respectively.

The powers that supported the regimes, who had subjected them to the dictates of neoliberal globalization imposed by the logic of the dominant imperialism of the triad (United States, Europe, Japan), was then to drop the two dictators, without, for all that, abandoning the destruction of the scope of the movement.

And to do that, the United States and its subordinate European allies have chosen to involve the Muslim Brotherhood to disorient and reverse the ‘revolution.’

The rainbow of the reactionary political currents of Islam — the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafists and Jihadists — may seem to constitute only a diverse and varied nebula, and the mainstream media present it that way. I will return later to the question of the dual common denominator that unites these organizations — called terrorists by some, ‘democratic’ Islam by others: (i) their undemocratic theocratic project, (ii) their adherence to ultra reactionary neoliberal capitalist management and to their anti-popular economic and social system, the only real objective of the imperialist triad.

We know— or should know— that the Muslim Brotherhood had initially been against the popular uprisings in Egypt. They joined them later, with the encouragement of the United States and Europe.

The intervention of the imperialist powers is multifaceted. It is manifested by the open and renewed political alliance between Washington (and behind it the European capitals) and reactionary political Islam. I say renewed, since, as I have shown in the first chapter of my book, this alliance was already been operational for a long time (I would go so far as to say since the creation of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928). But this intervention also puts in place other ‘modern’ means: the infiltration of popular movements by the CIA through the plethora of NGOs in its service. Amir Sharif’s book (published in French, *L’histoire secrète des Frères Musulmans*, i.e. “*The Secret History of the Muslim Brotherhood*”, 2014) and Michel Raimbaud (in French, *Tempête sur le Grand Moyen Orient*, i.e. “*Storm on the Greater Middle East*”, 2014) have provided proof. These manipulations pursue the objective of maintaining and deepening the fragmentation of the movement, thus condemning them to be unable to formulate and implement a positive strategy of initiating progressive transformation of society, of sowing ideological confusion by substituting radical critique of globalized and imperialist liberalism with praise for diversity and drifting towards the defense of allegedly paramount ‘identities’.

Is this a ‘permanent conspiracy’? No, it is a coherent and, unfortunately, effective strategy to date, for lack of the crystallization of an alternative left that is radical and daring, therefore able to unite — in diversity — the legitimate claims of the victims of the system. However this strategy does not exclude ‘conspiracies’, far from it. The diplomacy of Washington and CIA interventions are complementary. The overthrow of an elected President Allende on September 11, 1973, the murder (now with the use of drones) of a particular opponent, these are processes that should qualify them to be called by their real names: conspiracy, state terrorism.

Having learned from being taken by surprise by the Tunisian and Egyptian explosions, Washington has decided to forestall similar movements, real or otherwise, this time by initiating a “revolution” and simultaneously immediately taking direct brutal intervention and ‘preventive’ war in Libya, Syria, and Yemen. And armed reactionary political Islam has been sought for this purpose.

From the beginning of the alleged Libyan ‘revolts’ that actually were neither popular nor pacifist, but consisted of small armed groups that attacked the security forces (police and military), and in the same vein, the day of their intervention, called on NATO forces to their aid. We know what it produced. Beyond the assassination of Gaddafi, the break up of the country delivered by warlords and obviously without the slightest democratic progress. Was this a miscalculation of the NATO powers? No, that strategy has achieved its true purpose.

In Syria, where a breeding ground for the popular explosion fermenting since rallying late Baath regime to ‘infatih’ (submission to the demands of globalization), peaceful demonstrations were beginning another ‘Arab Spring’. But simultaneously, and from the first day, the Muslim Brotherhood and armed Jihadists attacked the police and demanded in turn intervention by NATO (and by Turkey, which is both Islamist and a NATO member). And that has been granted. Laurent Fabius – an unconditional friend of Israel – has he not gone so far as to dare to say that the Jihadists of Nosra have done ‘a good job in Syria.’ As they cut off the heads of Syrian soldiers, Alawites and Christians, they were helpful friends whose only act of terrorism was to have cut off

that of a Frenchman. But one should know that Islamist fascists, like all fascists, are unable to prevent derailing abuses, as I mentioned elsewhere (see, 'Fascism returns to contemporary capitalism', *Monthly Review* 2014). But the Syria of Bashar held, thanks in part to support from Iran and Russia, but mainly because his army had not disintegrated as hoped for by Washington and European capitals.

The strategy that the US has developed regarding the 'green belt', stretching from Morocco to Indonesia, is based since 1945 on a strategic alliance with Saudi Arabia and reactionary political Islam. The alliance is directed not only against the 'communist' adversary of yesteryear (the Soviet Union and China) but equally against the Arab anti-imperialist nationalism that forced imperialism in decline at the time of Bandung. Today, despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, the shift of China and submission of Arab governments to the dictates of neoliberal globalization, Washington continues without failure the same strategy for fear of an always possible revival in the Arab world and Russia, capable of imposing a reorganization of the world system based on the principle of negotiated multipolarity. The 'Islamic' ally (Wahhabi, Salafist, Jihadist) is valuable, because their eventual governing of the region condemn its people to impotence. Certainly this model of despotic government also remains unable to prevent terrorist excesses directed against 'the West'. But in the end these abuses are useful for the further strategy of destruction of Arab societies: they provide the arguments that give the appearance of legitimacy to NATO aggression and strengthens the consensus 'western opinion', manipulated in this manner. With the cynicism with which it is customary for Washington diplomacy then wins both ways.

This strategy is equally that of Zionism. One could even go so far as to say that it inspires the extreme attitudes taken by subalterns of the imperialist alliance, particularly France. The work of Michel Raimbaud gives convincing evidence. Washington in contrast reserves the right not to go to the extreme, if it deems it tactically necessary.

### **The ephemeral triumph of the Muslim Brotherhood**

Did the intervention of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and of the Nahda (the Tunisian branch of the Brotherhood), as is too often claimed without much reflection, contributed to the success of the explosion of anger by providing that force which they lacked to gain victory ? An analysis of the facts leads to other conclusions: this intervention weakened and divided the movement, thus permitting the United States and their subaltern European allies to intervene in their turn in the course of the subsequent events and prevent the success of the democratic forces.

Washington and its subaltern allies have fuelled a campaign to clear the name of the Brotherhood and to make them appear as the indispensable partners of the new Arab 'democracy'. Washington thus emphasized the need, for the sake of appearances, to hold elections quickly in both Tunisia and Egypt. And in that it has been successful. But, as we should know, the use of elections is nearly always the means of halting the spread of struggles. We have seen many such examples in history (including, for example, in France in 1968).

The electoral victories of the Brotherhood and the Salafists in Tunis and in Egypt in 2011 and 2012 were not surprising. We can see the obvious explanation in the conjuncture of three dangerous developments of the societies concerned: the social catastrophe produced by economic liberalism, the depoliticisation associated with the exercise of despotism by dictators in the service of this liberalism, and the erosion of the education system, something equally required by liberalism.

The degradation produced by contemporary capitalist globalization has led to a prodigious swelling of activities referred to as 'informal', which in Egypt provides a means of survival for more than half of the population (the statistics indicate some 60%). The Muslim Brotherhood is well placed to take advantage of this degradation of existence and to perpetuate its reproduction. Their simple ideology legitimizes this miserable market / bazaar economy, the antithesis of the requirements of development worthy of its name. The fabulous financial wealth that is available to the Brotherhood (from the Gulf states) permits them to transform these resources into effective action: providing financial advances to the informal economy, supporting charitable activities (care centers etc.). It is in this manner that the Brothers have implanted themselves in society and placed it under their control. The Gulf countries have never had the intention of supporting the development of Arab countries through industrial investments, for example. They support a model of *lumpen development* — to use the phrase proposed by Andre Gunder Frank — that imprisons the societies concerned in a downward spiral of impoverishment and exclusion, which in turn strengthens the influence of reactionary political Islam on the society.

Moreover, the management of contemporary 'liberal' capitalism by the governments in power is based on systematically organized depoliticization.

In the capitalist centers, the rallying of the historic left towards social-liberalism, the foundation for an appearance of a 'consensus' society, has eliminated the significance of the previous political and social distinctions between left and right.

In the peripheries, the exhaustion and repression of all historical currents of popular nationalism has created a vacuum that religion (Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism) or ethnicity (as in Yugoslavia, Africa and elsewhere) has been filled by moving from the wings to center-stage. Under these conditions the gibberish of dogmatic liberalism is accepted as hard cash by the dominant opinion. In the case of Egypt reactionary political Islam has endorsed without hesitation the 'recipes' of liberal economic policies ('long live the market,' we have nothing to say on this subject, it repeats ad nauseam). It has thus contributed to shifting the center of gravity of the debate from the field of social interests and social struggles (class struggles, taking into account all its practical complexities) to the arena of supposedly theological questions.

Nonetheless democratic opinion that rejects the theocratic response (as shown by the impressive demonstrations of June 30, 2013) is itself contaminated by the 'liberal virus.' It contributes in its turn to shifting the debate from economic and social issues that control reality to that of the abstract choice in favor of electoral democracy and nothing more. The general re-politicization that has characterized the Egyptian scene since 2011 is real, visible to all. It is certainly constitutes a good sign for the future. But it remains hitherto weak, in the sense that its awareness amongst the broad masses of the current real challenges (the social devastations produced by economic

liberalism) remains very inadequate. The contemporary world pays dearly for this regression of the political culture, in particular the erasure of Marxism. It is a regression characteristic of the hollowing of the historical wave, the pages of the rise and advances of the twentieth century being turned, and the rebirth of the movement for socialism in the twenty-first century rendered as a comic sentence.

Finally, it is necessary to mention the disastrous effects of the destruction of the education system. Liberalism requires that education programs meet the needs of the market. And in this spirit, the US bosses have systematically dismantled the education system in Iraq, from primary school to university, retaining ultimately little more than two courses: religion and business. Without even this brutal and cynical response, the education systems in the Arab world, as almost everywhere else on the planet, have succumbed, by privatization amongst other things, to the reforms that have deliberately excluded all ‘unnecessary’ teachings — philosophy, history, social thought — that are indispensable for building a society worthy of its name, with citizens free and able to express themselves in effective political terms. These reforms have favored above all the terrorist drift. What the Western media call ‘modern Islam’ is nothing more than the product of the implantation of ‘religion’ (understood as ritualistic practice) and ‘business’. The ‘modern Muslims’ in question are individuals incapable of critical thinking, even if they know how to use a computer to perfection.

Nevertheless, the success of the Muslim Brotherhood, even if it had been transient, would have been difficult if it had not fully responded to the political objectives of the Gulf countries, Washington and Israel. These three close allies share the same concern: to derail the recovery of Egypt. For the existence of a strong Egypt would be the end of the triple hegemony of the Gulf (submission to the discourse of the Islamization of society), the United States (a compradorised and impoverished Egypt that remains in their fold) and Israel (an impotent Egypt leaves them to do what they will in Palestine).

The rallying of regimes to neoliberalism and to submission to Washington was brutal and total in Egypt under Sadat, slower and more measured in Algeria and Syria. I recalled in the first chapter of this book that the Muslim Brotherhood — a party involved in the system of power — should not be considered simply as an ‘Islamist party’ but above all as an ultra reactionary party, albeit Islamist. Reactionary not only about so-called ‘social issues’ (the veil, Sharia, discrimination against Copts), but above all in the fundamental areas of economic and social life: the Brotherhood are opposed to strikes, to claims concerning work, to the power of independent unions, to the resistance movements against the expropriation of peasants etc.

The planned abortion of the ‘Egyptian revolution’ guarantees thus the continuity of the system put in place since Sadat founded on the alliance between the army and political Islam. Certainly, strengthened by their electoral victory, the Brotherhood was able to demand more power than had hitherto been granted by the military. Nevertheless, a revision of the sharing of the benefits from this alliance to the benefit of the Brothers proved ultimately impossible.

The government of the Brotherhood demonstrated in record time its inability to implant itself in society. Just weeks after their electoral victory, Parliament and the President lost their legitimacy in the eyes of the overwhelming majority of citizens,

including those who had naively voted for them. The arrogance of the Brotherhood certainly contributed to this reversal of opinions about them. Morsi thought he could set up the theocratic state defined by the program of the Brotherhood as rapidly as Khomeini had done in Iran. He forgot that the Iranian revolution was led by the Islamists, while in Egypt the Islamists had only jumped on the bandwagon once the mass mobilizations had occurred. Thus Morsi systematically removed all responsible officials to replace them on the spot with members of the Brotherhood, who were generally incompetent and greedy for self-enrichment. He did not hesitate to say that, having been elected, he had that right! Can you imagine, furthermore, an elected president revoking all members of the Superior Council of Magistracy, the Media Council and all national institutions (Universities, Museums, Power, Railways etc) in defiance of all the regulations of these institutions? Yet the term ‘permanent coup d’état’ that was on the lips of all Egyptian was not the subject of any commentary from the Western media! Furthermore, the Brotherhood did not understand that they had to deal with SCAF (the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces): they chose to try to eliminate immediately its political presence. This was their mistake.

### **The electoral farce of 2011 and 2012**

Egypt's parliamentary elections in October 2011 and the presidential elections in 2012 were anything but fair and transparent.

The first round of presidential elections on 24 May 2012 was organized to achieve the goal that the powers in place and Washington pursued: to reinforce the alliance between the two pillars of the system, the army command and the Muslim Brotherhood, and to resolve their different roles (which of the two will take center stage). In this spirit, the two ‘acceptable’ candidates had been the only ones to benefit from enormous campaign finances. Yet Morsi collected only 24% of the votes and Shafiq (the army) 23%. The only authentic candidate of the movement, Hamdin Sabbahi, who had not benefitted from the resources put at the disposal of the other candidates, would have collected 21% of the votes (the figure itself is debatable). After lengthy negotiations, a deal was concluded to declare Morsi the winner of the second round.

The Assembly, like the President, was elected through the massive organization for the distribution of ‘boxes’ (stuffed with meat, oil and sugar) distributed to voters who gave their votes to the Islamists. We should also mention the massive fraud (ballot stuffing by militiamen, Brotherhood members seizing polling stations), the prohibition against Coptic villagers from participating in the vote, etc. Moreover, the ‘foreign observers’ failure to notice this has made them the laughing stock of the Egyptian streets.

So when in April 2012 the Constitutional Court invalidated the parliamentary elections, it did nothing more than to note the actual massive fraud. We can note, nevertheless, that this dissolution was delayed by the Army Command who wanted, perhaps, to give the government stemming from this Assembly time to discredit itself in the eyes of the public by its stubborn refusal to address social issues (employment, wages, school, health).



In Egypt the drafting of a new constitution has not been the subject of much attention. The Nasser Constitution, itself revised by Sadat, has never been questioned. The presidential system that it establishes, as elsewhere in the world, the United States, France, Latin America, Africa, is, in my view, a step backwards in comparison to the parliamentary systems invented in Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth century. This is because this system contributes significantly to reduce politics to false debates between celebrities, each avoiding calling into question the policies of the economic liberal consensus. So this is a perfect system for consolidating the real power of the financial oligarchy.

In the Egyptian case, the debate has focused only on the proposed amendments regarding the place of Sharia in the law: should it be an exclusive source, or one source amongst others. The amendment submitted by referendum in May 2011 accentuated the Islamic character of the law. It was opposed by the majority of active players in the movement, but nevertheless adopted under pressure of the Islamists (not shrinking from fraud, as usual) and the neutrality adopted in its place by the Army Command.

Moreover the Egyptian constitution is not just a presidential constitution of the usual format. It prohibits elected civilian authorities any control over the actions of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, thus always guaranteeing public order as a final resort.

The Constitutional drift came later, under the reign of Morsi. The constitutional project created by the Muslim Brotherhood would have allowed the establishment of a theocratic regime, inspired by the example of Iran. It's important to acknowledge that Khomeini's revolution of 1979 was greeted with enthusiasm by the Brotherhood, despite its Iranian Shiism. The Egyptian project would provide for the substitution of a Council of *Ulemas* (scholars of Muslim religious law) for the Constitutional Court. This Council would have benefitted from a right of inspection and of veto which would in fact have eliminated the division of powers between the judiciary, executive and the legislature. The Council of Ulemas would in fact be entitled to halt any bill passed by the deputies if deemed inconsistent with its own interpretation of Sharia. In the same way the Council was empowered to reverse any decision of the executive and the administration and any judgment of any court. So when Sissi annulled the project in July 2013 he did nothing more than to support the virtually unanimous opinion that opposed the theocratic drift.

The reason for the subsequent rift between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Iranian regime was not based on a different assessment of desirable regime (theocracy in both cases) but on other conjunctural political considerations.

In the Gulf Wahhabism is associated with tribalism. The alliance sealed in the eighteenth century between the founder of Wahhabism and the Saud clan had defined once and for all the model of the regime: Wahhabi theocracy controls the society while political management of the country is ensured by the absolute monarchy of Saud in alliance with the tribal leaderships. But now, certain currents of Salafism (including with Wahhabi allegiance) that aspire to rid the theocracy of its royal tutelage could challenge this covenant: Bin Laden had initiated this development. The Saudi monarchy therefore requires its allies of political Islam that they separate

themselves decisively from these ‘too fundamentalist’ aspirations! Having failed to do so, the Brotherhood were then forced to barter the support of Ryad for that of Qatar, who for particular reasons of their own, took over. Furthermore, the confrontation between the Gulf States and Iran for control of maritime traffic in the region took a more acute turn, the United States fearing the adoption by Iran of an independent political stance, even if its adherence to the principles of economic liberalism would not be questioned. Of course in this conflict, the competitors then mobilize their religious affiliations (Shia and Sunni).

The system in place, ‘chaired’ by Morsi, was the best guarantee of the pursuit of lumpen-development and the destruction of state institutions, which are the objectives pursued by Washington. The movement, which has lost none of its firm commitment to the struggle for democracy, social progress and national independence, thus continued after the electoral farce that gave power to Morsi and the Brotherhood. The movement eventually managed to create the conditions for the fall of Morsi and his henchmen and to put a stop to the outrageous excesses of despotic government of the Brotherhood.

However, none of these fundamental questions recalled here appear to have bothered the major political actors beyond some vigilant intellectuals. Everything happened as if the ultimate goal of the ‘revolution’ was to have quick elections. As if the sole source of legitimacy of power lay in the ballot box. But there is nevertheless another superior legitimacy —the pursuit of the struggles for social progress and the authentic democratization of societies. These two aspects are called upon in the serious confrontations to come. One can already see them emerging clearly in Egypt.

### **Is Political Islam compatible with democracy?**

We are assaulted by reassuring speeches to this effect, incredibly naive, whether sincere or deceptive. Some say: ‘It was inevitable, our societies are permeated by Islam, we wanted to ignore it, but it imposed itself on us.’ As if this success of political Islam was not due to the de-politicization and social degradation that they want to disregard. ‘This is not so dangerous. Their success is fleeting and the bankruptcy of power exercised by political Islam will result in people disengaging themselves from it.’ As if the Brotherhood in question were committed to the principle of respect for democratic principles! Washington pretends to believe the ‘opinions’ fabricated by the dominant media and the cohort of some Arab ‘intellectuals’ through their opportunism or lack of lucidity.

We hear that there are Christian Democrat parties, so why not Islamist democrats? Yes, in abstract theory, why not. If the equivalent does not hold, however, it is simply because the Brotherhood have created a fascist party. The Brotherhood have been headed since 1928 by a *Mourchid*, a choice of name inspired by their admiration of the Duce and the Fuhrer. The Mourchid is chosen by a committee whose members' names are kept secret. The Brotherhood provides in its founding documents the parallel creation of a ‘secret organization’ which gives it the right, for example, to set fire to the churches. I translate for Europeans: do you know of a Christian Democrat party, which gives it the right to burn synagogues?

No. The exercise of power by the reactionary political Islam would be expected to last ... 50 years? And while it would help push societies that it would submit daily into insignificance on the world stage, 'others' would continue their progress. At the end of this sad 'transition' countries concerned will gather at the bottom of the ladder of world classification.

Depoliticization has been decisive in the rise of political Islam. This depoliticization is certainly not unique to Nasserist Egypt and post-Nasserism. It has been the dominant practice in all popular national experiences of the first awakening of the South and even in those historical socialisms after the first phase of revolutionary ferment was outworn. The common denominator: the suppression of democratic practice (which I do not reduce to being merely the holding of multiparty elections), that is to say, respect for diversity of opinions and political propositions and for their eventual organization. Politicization requires democracy. In every case of its suppression, the process of depoliticization is responsible for the subsequent disaster. Such depoliticization takes the form of returns to former ideologies or beliefs (religious or otherwise), or it takes the form of an adherence to the 'consumerism' and the false individualism proposed by Western media. The latter was the case with the peoples of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, as is the case moreover also not only amongst the middle classes (potential beneficiaries of development) but also amongst the popular classes, who, lacking an alternative, aspire to benefit from it even at a very small scale (which is of course perfectly understandable and legitimate).

In the case of Muslim societies this depoliticization takes the principal form in an apparent 'return' of Islam. The articulation, combining the power of reactionary political Islam, the compradorian submission and impoverishment through informalization of the bazaar economy, is not specific to Egypt. It is already a characteristic of most of the Arab and Muslim societies, as far as Pakistan and beyond. This same articulation operates in Iran: the triumph of this bazaar economy had been described from the beginning as the major outcome of the 'Khomeini revolution.' This same articulation of Islamic power and the Bazaar market economy has devastated Somalia, now erased from the map of existing nations (see 'Is there a solution to the problems of Somalia, web site *Pambazuka News* 17/2/ 2011).

The question of democratic politicization constitutes, in the Arab world as elsewhere, the central axis of the challenges we face. Our epoch is not that of democratic advances, but on the contrary to setbacks in this domain. The extreme centralization of generalized monopoly capital requires and demands the unconditional and total surrender of political power to its command. The emphasis on 'presidential' powers, on intense individualized appearances, but actually completely subject to and in the service of the financial plutocracy, is the form of the projection that annihilates the scope of defunct bourgeois democracy (itself enhanced sometime by workers' conquests) and substitutes it with a democratic farce.

In the peripheries the embryos of democracy, when they exist, lose their credibility by being associated with social regression even more violent than in the centers of the system. The decline of democracy is synonymous with depoliticization. For it implies the assertion that citizens are incapable of formulating authentic alternative social projects, not just envisaging "alternating governments without change of policies!"

through elections that are without effect. The existence of citizens capable of creative imagination is disappearing, the depoliticized individuals that have succeeded them are passive spectators of the political scene, consumers modeled by the system that make them think themselves (wrongly) as free individuals.

Advancement on the path of democratization of societies and the re-politicization of peoples, these are inseparable processes. But where to start? The movement can be initiated from one or the other of these two poles. Nothing here can be substituted for the concrete analysis of situations in Algeria, in Egypt, as in Greece, China, Congo, Bolivia, France or Germany. In the absence of visible progress along these lines, the world will be engaged, as it is already, in the continued chaotic turmoil associated with the collapse of the system. The consequences are worse than terrifying.

### **About Salafism**

Salafism is a product of the abortion of the Nahda of the 19th century (see Chapter 3 of this book) that ended with the obscurantist proposals of Rachid Reda, a convert to Wahhabism (the most archaic form of Islam) and adopted out of hand by the Muslim Brotherhood from the beginning (1927). Salafists reject the concepts of freedom and democracy, which according to them, do not take into account of ‘nature’ that requires the man to obey God (‘like a slave must obey his master’ — the expression is theirs). Of course only the clergymen are allowed to say what God commands. The way is then open to theocracy (*wilayah al faqih*).

Like Edmund Burke and Joseph de Maistre, Salafists are the enemies of ‘modernity’, if by that we mean the claim that humans are individually and collectively — in society — responsible for making their own history. The media pretend nevertheless that the Salafists are ‘modern’, on the pretext that they do not prohibit computers and ‘business management’, and they also teach from textbooks that USAID provides. Obviously management of the system requires skilled servants, provided they are devoid of critical capacity.

The Brotherhood, the Salafists and the Jihadists share the goals of ‘Islamization of society and the state.’ Salafists and Jihadists openly say what the Brotherhood always think but cannot say so openly so as to qualify for the certificate of democracy that Obama awards them.

### **Democracy or destruction of states and nations?**

For the ‘Greater Middle East’, the objective of the United States and their subordinate NATO allies is certainly not democracy, but rather the guarantee for ensuring the submission of the countries concerned to the requirements for the implementation of globalization such that it functions for the exclusive benefit of the imperialist monopolies. ‘All changes so that nothing changes.’ Lumpen development based on exclusion and impoverishment of the vast majority of people is the essential product of this strategy.

Achieving this goal requires the destruction of those states and societies that resist. Iraq provides the model. Here the US rulers have substituted the dictatorship of

Saddam Hussein three more criminal dictatorships in the name of ‘religion’ (Sunni and Shia) and ‘Kurdish ethnicity.’ They also carried out the systematic murder of tens of thousands of scientists and professional, administrators, and others including poets, and prohibited any form of education other than ‘religious’ and ‘useful’ (i.e. ‘business management’!).

The new objective is the destruction of Syria, the ally of Iran, the next target. The nuclear issue has been raised to that effect. Two weights, two measures, as always: Israel’s nuclear military arsenal attracts no comment!

But beyond this strategy lies concerns about the ‘emerging’ countries, primarily China and Russia. The United States establishment has formulated for this purpose a two-pronged strategy. First is to ‘contain’ the efforts of these countries in their pursuit of modifying globalization and imposing upon it a polycentric order, thus putting an end to the ‘hegemony’ of Washington. The word used here is ‘containment’. But in the longer term the aim is to destroy capacity of these countries for autonomous movement, to ‘re-colonize’ them in some way. The term used by the US is ‘rolling back’. This perspective openly entails the abolition of international law and respect for the sovereignty of states, and entails the recourse to war. The ‘preventive wars’ (more accurately preparatory wars) that the US has been involved with in the Middle East are part of this perspective.

The objective is to ensure the dominance over the world of the ‘North’, that is to say, the dominance of the monopolies of the triad—USA, Europe and Japan— and in particular to ensure their exclusive access to natural resources of the entire planet, to make use of it in a way that we know to be ecologically disastrous. The pseudo-cultural themes invoked for this purpose (‘the defense of democracy’, itself subject to continuous erosion in North, ‘the war of civilizations’, the invention of the so-called ‘right to humanitarian intervention’ or ‘right to protect’) are there to hide the real objectives. This strategy implies for the peoples of the South a lumpen-development and nothing else. This system is not ‘sustainable’, not only for known environmental reasons, but equally for the political and social disasters that are exemplified by it. The Arab ‘revolutions’ (barely begun) are not the only responses to that strategy. There are those which are more sustained such as in Latin America, and include the rise of struggles across the entire world, Europe included, that testify to the universality of the contestation.

### **Outline of a social disaster response**

I don’t need to restate here the developments to which I have devoted the first chapter of this book on the long waves of the tentative emergence of Egypt (1805-1875 and 1920-1970), on the reasons for their failure, and on the two waves of restructuring of the economy and of the society imposed by dominant imperialism which followed these failures (1875-1920 and 1970-2011). We have now entered what could be considered as the emergence of a third wave of struggles, which is why a balance sheet of recent years 2011 to 2015 can only be partial and provisional.

Implemented on a global scale, the principles of liberal capitalism do not produce anything in the 'South' other than crony capitalism hinged on a comprador state. It is not development but lumpen-development. Egypt provides a good example.

*Crony capitalism, comprador and lumpen development (1970-2012)*

The Nasserist project of building a national developmental state had produced a model of state capitalism that Sadat pledged to dismantle. The assets owned by the state have been 'sold'. To whom? To some businessmen close to power: senior officers, senior functionaries, wealthy merchants (who, moreover provide political and financial support to the Muslim Brotherhood). But they were sold also to 'Arabs' of the Gulf States as well as to US and European foreign companies. At what price? At ridiculous prices, incommensurate with the real value of the assets. Thus was built the new 'owning' Egyptian and foreign class, which fully deserves the descriptor of crony capitalism (the Egyptian term being *rasmalia al mahassib*). The property granted to the 'army' has transformed its character and the responsibilities it had in working as a state institution. Their powers of supervision have become those of owning private property. Moreover in the race to privatization the most powerful officers also 'acquired' property from many other state assets: commercial chains, land and housing developments in particular. Foreign capital inflows, which remained limited, fit into this framework. The whole operation is completed with the establishment of private monopoly groups that dominate the Egyptian economy.

This domination was reinforced by the almost exclusive access that these new billionaires have had to bank credit, at the expense of small and medium producers. These monopolistic positions were also favored with huge state subsidies for oil consumption, natural gas and electricity for the factories transferred by the State to private interests (cement, metallurgy of iron and aluminum, textiles and other). And the 'free market' has allowed these companies to raise their prices to adjust to those of any competing imports. The rationale for public subsidy, which had compensated for the lower prices charged by the state sector, has been broken in favor of super-profits for private monopolies. The salaries of the vast majority of workers have seriously worsened by the effect of the laws of the free labor market and by repression of trade unions. Super-profits for private monopolies and impoverishment go hand-in-hand and result in the continued widening of inequality in the distribution of income, reinforced by a tax system that rejected the principle of progressive taxation. This light tax for the rich and corporations, touted by the World Bank for its alleged support for the virtues of investment, has simply resulted in the growth of super-profits.

These policies have also made it impossible to reduce public deficit and the balance of trade. They have led to the continued deterioration of the value of the Egyptian pound, and imposed a growing internal and external debt. This gave the justification to the IMF for forcefully imposing the principles of liberalism.

*An immediate response program*

The program whose proposals I summarize in the text below has been the subject of extensive discussions within the parties of the Egyptian left, unions and many associations for middle-professionals. It has been aired also in the press.

1. The procedures for the disposal of public assets should be subject to systematic probing. Since the ‘buyers’ have paid ridiculous prices, ownership must be transferred by law to public companies in which the state will be a shareholder with its stake equivalent to the difference between the actual value and that paid by the buyers.
2. The law should set the minimum wage at an amount roughly equivalent to the purchasing power of 400 Euros (at 2011 value), which is lower in fact than in many countries where GDP per capita is comparable to Egypt. This wage must be linked to a sliding scale, and with the participation of trade unions in its implementation. It will apply to all undertakings of the public and private sectors.
3. The rights of workers, employment, working conditions, and health, unemployment, retirement insurance should be clarified on the basis of a tripartite consultation (trade unions, employers, and state). Independent unions established in recent years should be recognized, as should the right to strike (still ‘illegal’ under current legislation). Social security compensation must be established for the unemployed.
4. Subsidies granted from the national budget to private monopolies should be removed.
5. New legislation must be adopted introducing progressive taxation of individuals and rising to 25% of corporate profits tax rates on those institutions with more than 20 workers. Taxation of small and medium enterprises, which is often heavier than on the larger corporations (!) should be revised downwards. The proposed rates for higher income bracket people (35%) also remains light in international comparisons.
6. The measures proposed in points 4 and 5 can not only eliminate the current deficit, but will produce a surplus. This will be used to increase public spending on education, health, and housing. The reconstruction of a public social sector in these areas does not impose discriminatory measures against the private activities of a similar nature.
7. Credit must be placed under the control of the Central Bank. The facilities granted to monopolies must be removed for the benefit of existing and newly created SMEs.
8. Concerning the agrarian question, the goal is to make it difficult for the eviction of farmers who are unable to pay the rents charged and to make it difficult to expropriate indebted smallholder farmers. We advocate a return to a law fixing the maximum rents for lease (they were removed by successive legislation). Concrete plans exist for ensuring the growth of smallholder farming: improved irrigation methods (drip etc.), choice of rich and intensive crops (vegetables and fruits), the provision of freedom upstream by State control of suppliers of inputs and credit, and downstream by the creation of marketing cooperatives linked with consumer cooperatives.

This immediate program of action would initiate the recovery of healthy and sustainable economic growth. The argument advanced by liberal critics— that this would ruin any hope inflows of external origin— does not hold water. The experience of Egypt and other countries, particularly in Africa, who have agreed to submit fully

to the requirements of liberalism and gave up developing an independent development project shows that they ‘attract’ no external capital despite their uncontrolled opening of their economies— indeed they don’t precisely because of it. External capital then merely carries out looting operations on the resources of the countries involved, supported by the comprador state. In contrast, emerging countries that are implementing national development projects offer real opportunities for foreign investment that accept to be part of the national projects.

The program of immediate demands, about which I have only outlined the principle elements, only deals with the economic and social aspects of the challenges faced. Of course the movement has also discussed everything in relation to the political aspects: the draft constitution, democratic and social rights, the necessary affirmation of ‘the state of citizens’ (*Dawla al muwatana*) contrasting with the proposed state theocracy (*Dawla al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya*) of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The government, composed exclusively of Muslim Brotherhood members chosen by Mohammed Morsi, declared its unconditional support for all the principles of liberalism, taken measures to accelerate their implementation, and deployed for this purpose all the means of repression that they inherited from the fallen regime. The same set of ‘liberal’ policies have been pursued by Prime Minister Beblawi, installed by Sissi but then subsequently removed, no doubt because the unpopularity of these policies might spill over and reflect on Sissi himself. His successor has yet to show proof of having a different commitment.

### **Out of the confusion.**

The greatest confusion nevertheless still dominates the scene.

The ‘constitution’ adopted by the referendum of January 2014 does not break with the concept of a state religion. Sharia remains the source of the law, and the army command remains the power of last resort. It was nevertheless adopted with a certain enthusiasm because it rallied to it the demand of the overwhelming majority for bringing an end to the theocratic project of the Muslim Brotherhood. The presidential elections of June 2014 confirmed the victory of Sissi. Is this regime to continue the same policy of liberalism that was the original cause of the crisis? That much has been signaled: it is envisaged that the Council of the Gulf States, the cornerstone for the adherence to neoliberalism and of the submission to the strategic objectives of the United States in the region, will be enlarged to include Egypt, Jordan and Morocco!

Nevertheless, Hamdin Sabbahi, referred to as the ‘unacceptable Nasserite communist’ by the US embassy, received as many votes as Morsi in the last presidential elections. This active ‘minority’ (in electoral terms) is the only one capable of driving the actions of the majority of the movement. The struggle to force an exit from neoliberalism and for the adoption of the above action program thus continues. The pursuit of the ongoing struggles could then compel Sissi to change his tune, just as was the case with Nasser in 1956, shifting from a naïve adherence to economic liberalism to the project of national and social liberation. Of course the conditions of our epoch, so different to those prevailing during the epoch of Bandung, prevents us



from pushing that comparison too far. The future is open, for 'if the revolution did not change the regime, it changed the people'.

### **Back to the debate of the 1950s**

The return to the debates that were concerned in the past with the relationship between the Nasserite nationalists and the communists allows us to identify the true nature of the challenge that the Egyptian people were and continue to confront. We come up against two visions and two projects, two strategies to be implemented. On the one hand we are dealing with a vision of the 'national bourgeoisie', that is to say an 'anti-imperialist/anti-feudal' project (in the language of that epoch) in which the national bourgeoisie, supported by a nationalist state, could lead to a desired conclusion. And on the other hand, a 'popular national' vision founded on the idea that the bourgeoisie (in this case the Egyptian) cannot move the movement to the desired end because it is inconceivable for it to step outside of compromise (or capitulation) with imperialism and 'feudalism', and that, consequently, only a broad popular movement, led by a 'communist' vanguard could achieve it. This second vision was, at times and for some amongst them, that of the Egyptian communists. But they remained vacillating and at other times abandoned the vision in favor of rallying to the bourgeois nationalist project (Nasser in this case). In those distant times when the debate about nationalism vs communism thus defined occupied the center stage, 'Islamism' was pushed to the sidelines, and the people's attachment to religion did not influence their political position.

Yet it must be remembered that the Nasserist national project was not a project of the Free Officers who took power, a group of men without a political culture, for most of them close to the Muslim Brotherhood. From 1952 to 1955 they implemented the program of the Federation of Egyptian Industries: appeals to international capital and to the landed aristocracy to 'develop' the country, friendship with the United States and so on. Nasser only became 'Nasserite' after Bandung, having then realized that he had to part with these reactionary officers and to replace their support with the support of the nation and the people. I refer the reader here to my previous work '*Nassérisme et communisme égyptien.*'

The same questions that were asked seventy years ago are emerging once again today. Similar responses to those that had been given in the past reappear like a tideline. For neither Mubarak nor Morsi were ousted by the army. They were defeated by popular anger, by the events that brought together fifteen million citizens against Mubarak, and thirty million against Morsi. But this movement remained from start divided and without strategy. The movement was unable to link, on the one hand, the need for unity in action for the setting of common strategic objectives, and on the other hand, giving recognition to the diversity of specific social (class) interests of the different constituents of the movement. This inability benefited the army command that 'joined' (apparently) the movement, ousted Mubarak and then Morsi, but kept control over the reins of power to themselves.

The army in power revives nostalgia about the Nasserist past and which General Sissi feeds in a systematic way by gestures and allusions, but nothing more. And facing the return (possible or impossible?) to 'Nasserism', the same posturing, similar to the way

they were at the heart of the conflicts of the 1950s, are reappearing. Sissi in control, being ambiguous and intelligent to boot, seems the only option. This ambiguity is reflected then amongst the different currents of opinion. There are those that are unconditionally 'pro-Sissi', a camp which obviously attracts all the beneficiaries of the arrangements that were in place from 1970 to date, but also those who are undecided, those frigid with fear of disorder who prefer to leave in place a system that they know rather than risk the unknown. Then, there are those who think that 'Sissi is not bad, and can evolve in the right direction', that is to say, engage slowly but surly towards 'Nasserism' the affirmation of sovereignty and progressive social reforms. 'Let us give him therefore our confidence. Let us help him, instead of fighting him.' These positions are strangely reminiscent of many of the democrats, progressives, socialists and communists during the period 1955-1965. And then there are those who are 'anti-Sissi' on principle. "No, no to any military, no alternative but a return to elected civilian government". In this debate the center of gravity is shifted. The movement accepts placing itself on the terrain defined by the power, whose only concern is: how to stay in control. The movement refuses to go on the offensive and challenge the power so that it has to respond to its initiatives.

The future of the 'Egyptian revolution' remains uncertain. Who will win? Will the senior officers and their SCAF who have been systematically corrupted by 'US aid' impose their point of view— to continue the policies of Sadat and Mubarak? Or will Sissi, like Nasser did yesteryear, dare to part with them in order to orient in the only way that can allow the emergence of Egypt? This optimistic but not unrealistic hypothesis implies that the movement becomes more mature in the formulation of its three interlinked objectives (new ways of development for the benefit of the all the people, democratization, and affirmation of national independence), that it becomes capable of setting strategic objectives for common progress for various social components of the alternative block to the one led by the comprador bourgeoisie.

### **The future of the Arab revolutions**

It is certainly too early to take stock of the 'Arab spring' other than provisionally and step by step for the simple reason that the ambitions expressed by the peoples concerned are a long way from achieving their goals.

These ambitions are not many and varied nor conflicting, they constitute rather the embryo of a coherent and authentic alternative based on three inseparable transformations of the system itself: undertaking a new path of development in which all people benefit, the democratization of political and social life, and the assertion of national independence.

It is essential to dispel the illusion that it is possible to reconcile the establishment of democratic forms of political management in these countries with the pursuit of liberal economic policies. The market and democracy are not complementary to one another, rather they are contradictory. Important sections of the movements in struggle are probably not yet taken account of this antinomy. The selection by Western countries of reactionary coalitions involving the parties of the right, heirs of the fallen regimes and of the Islamists, is perfectly consistent with the only aim of these powers: which is to guarantee the interests of monopoly capital. That this option

negates the chances of democracy in the countries concerned is not seen as their problem.

The aspirations of the Arab peoples expressed daily, despite the different conditions of their struggles, are always grounded in three slogans which recur persistently: (i) social justice (*el adala el Ijtimaia*), (ii) respect for people (*karama al insan*), (iii) respect for nations (*karama al watan*).

We need to give a more precise meaning for each of these slogans. A new path of development, the only guarantee of social justice claimed by the vast majority of people, is excluded in the current economic model, and is synonymous with a rupture with the economic liberalism. And because this option comes into open conflict with the logic of the global system dominated by the imperialist powers, the assertion of national independence, in turn, is the condition for progress in this direction. It is therefore necessary to relinquish the exploration of 'friendship' with the United States and Europe, to give up seeking their 'economic aid', to revive the spirit of Bandung, to open negotiations with China and the BRICS, and to flesh out the prospect of rebuilding a front of the South. Could a project of this kind be implemented 'from above' by 'national' powers? This was the case in the era of Bandung and of national popular but undemocratic projects of that era (1955-1980). But today a replay of those projects seems hard to imagine: first, because the new ruling classes, shaped and enriched by their adherence to the liberal globalization established over four decades, aspire only to maintain the system from which they benefit. Moreover, sections of the peoples concerned today aspire to something better than enlightened despotism. Democratic demands must be seen in this context. It cannot be reduced to the application of the recipe of 'multi-party elections.' This would be instead the safest way to derail the democratization process and, ultimately, to annihilate its credibility and legitimacy, by substituting 'the alternative without change' in place of a search for new alternatives. Democratization is above all the opening, in law and in fact, of the possibility for the popular classes organizing to take over for themselves the defense of their rights and interests. In this perspective, democratization opens the doors to prospects for its permanent enrichment by taking into account all the dimensions of the challenges faced by humanity: the global ecological dimension, its ideological dimension (by substituting the principle of solidarity for those of competition in the process of social reconstruction), its polycultural dimension (by refusing to consider modernization and Westernization as synonyms).

For all these reasons I set the goal of 'exiting from economic liberalism' at the heart of the challenges we face. Without commitment to this goal, the discourse on democracy and on national independence is meaningless. And in the absence of progress in this direction, the cultural drifts (into Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, known as the fundamentalisms) and the terrorist actions that accompany them, are inevitable. I think we need more than ever to insist on this point.

The criminal acts of terrorism suffered by Western citizens (the recent attacks against Charlie Hebdo in Paris and the Bardo Museum in Tunis) serve to perfection the justification for the deployment of an aggressive strategy by imperialist powers. They helped to frame an ideology of security whose abundant smoke was spread by the media clergy enabling them to forget that the soil in which the seed of terrorism was itself nurtured was through liberal economic policies that these same powers have not

given up imposing on the people of the South. That ideology invites people to consider irrelevant the support that Washington and its subordinate European allies have given to terrorists who were helpful in their strategy of domination in Arab countries. It invites us all to join a ‘global front against terrorism,’ in which the leaders parade from coast to coast the very powers responsible for the stoking the fires of terrorism (why not Netanyahu?) and their victims. The only common front that people need is not this one, but one that would unite— against global liberalism— all victims, the people of the South and those of the North. Moving in this direction is the only way to turn off the terrorist blaze.

Measured in terms the criteria of advancing of a genuine alternative to liberal and imperialist globalization, which is anti-democratic by nature, the conquests that the ‘Arab Spring’ have made to date are rather meager.

Yet the rulers keep pointing out as examples the advances such as those seen in Tunisia that, we are told, is well on the way along the path to democracy.

The commitment to democracy of important segments of the Tunisian people who courageously opened the Arab revolts is not in question. Their distinct gain is the fruit of the seeds that Bourguiba had sown in his time in support of women's rights. Thus the Tunisian revolution was largely supported by the emergence of a female component that was significantly more visible than elsewhere. For my part I just want to say that democratic progress in Tunisia for a large part is indebted to the struggles of women. Another advantage that Tunisia had was the existence of a powerful national workers union UGTT (*Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail* – The Tunisian General Labor Union), which had been at the forefront of the struggle for independence and which understood the need, thereafter, to maintain their real autonomy, albeit relative, in spite of the efforts by Bourguiba, and by Ben Ali in particular, to try to domesticate or eliminate their influence. The UGTT thus has managed to become the major organizing center for the popular movement. Its renewed fight for social justice should be at the core of the Tunisian movement.

Yet the fact remains that major sections of the movement subscribed, with much naïveté, to encouragements from Western powers (the United States and France in particular) and, in the process, agreed to holding immediate elections. The success of Nahda as the local branch of the International Muslim Brotherhood, which was no surprise, threatened in turn to sink the country into a theocratic project. The goals of the movement were then displaced— as in Egypt— and priority had to be given to the fighting the implementation of this theocratic project, instead of continuing the struggles for social justice, democratization and assertion of national independence. The price paid for the retreat that Nahda represented was heavy: to this end a pseudo-national unity had to be constructed, based on the return to the tracks set by the politicians of the ousted regime. More than that, the process has enabled the integration of Nahda into the government of national unity, thus making the government powerless in the face of the requirements of the open liberal market economy to imperialist globalization.

There is no reason to welcome this development. The spark for effective responses to real social challenges has not been primed. This is probably why the Western media continue to praise it – ‘These developments demonstrate that political Islam can be

democratic,' they claim. Nahda leaders have also condemned the terrorist attack on the Bardo museum. But one should be aware that the Muslim Brotherhood boast of practicing *taqia* — that is to say, the right to lie in order to advance by all means their theocratic project. We should be even more concerned to see Western opinion— represented by 'pro-South' NGOs— subscribe to the same theses, at best naïvely, or perhaps inspired by their rallying to social liberalism.

So the situation in Tunisia remains unstable as elsewhere, in Egypt for example. And for the same reasons: the reluctance to break with the dogmas of economic liberalism, considered as the only alternative. What Westerners greet as the Tunisian gain (national unity) seems to many Tunisians as a real handicap for the continuation of the struggle for a genuine and viable alternative.

The silence of the Algerian people contrasts with the surge of popular movements in Tunisia and Egypt. The Western media attributed this silence to the autocratic character of the Algerian government. Another lie: that power is clearly less repressive than it is elsewhere in the Arab world today. This silence must be explained in other ways.

The two experiments— of Algeria and Egypt— share many common characteristics, which— in their strength — enable one to understand the importance they have as 'models' for Arab countries and beyond. But the differences, which are not minimal, merit explanation.

The political leadership in both Algeria and Egypt, which was built in the framework of Boumediénism and Nasserism, respectively, were basically similar: their identical projects need in fact to be assessed in the same way: they were both truly national and popular (not 'populist') projects. It is not important that both described themselves as 'socialist'— that they were certainly not, and could not be. Probably more serious is the fact that much of the radical left – of the communist tradition — believed that they were indeed 'socialist' with the encouragement of Soviet diplomacy. In both experiments, their achievements have been significant, to the point that they truly transformed from top to bottom the face of the countries concerned for the better, not for the worse. But also, in both countries these achievements quickly reached the limits of what they could deliver. Their internal limits— identical in both cases — prevented them from moving ahead in order to pursue their project.

But beyond these similarities, their differences are worth noting. The Algerian model showed clear signs of a much greater consistency, which is why it has been more resilient to its further decline. Thus the Algerian ruling class remains complex and divided, divided between those that still have national aspirations on the one hand, and those rallying towards compradorization on the other hand (sometimes we even find the two conflicting components combined in the same individuals!). In Egypt in contrast, this ruling class has become fully integrated, with Sadat and Mubarak, a comprador bourgeoisie, not nourishing any kind of national aspiration.

Two major reasons account for these differences.

The liberation war in Algeria had produced organically a social and ideological radicalization. In contrast, in Egypt Nasserism came eventually in the period of the

rise of the mass movement, initiated by the 1919 revolution, which radicalized in 1946. The equivocal coup of 1952 thus comes in response to the impasse of the movement.

Furthermore Algerian society had suffered, with colonization, major destructive incursions. The new Algerian society emerging after regaining independence, had nothing in common with that of the pre-colonial epoch. It became a *plebeian* society, marked by a strong aspiration for equality. Such aspirations is not found to the same degree anywhere else in the Arab world, nor in the Maghreb (think of the strength of the archaic tradition of respect for the monarchy in Morocco!) nor in the Mashreq. By contrast, modern Egypt was built from the beginning (since Mohamed Ali) by its aristocracy, gradually becoming an ‘aristocratic bourgeoisie’ (or ‘capitalist aristocracy’).

From these differences follows another about the future of political Islam (in Algeria being the FIS – *Front Islamique du Salut*, Islamic Salvation Front), which unveiled its hideous face and was veritably routed. This certainly does not mean that this issue has been finally resolved. But the difference with Egypt is substantial: the latter is characterized by a strong convergence between the power of the comprador bourgeoisie and that of the political Islam of the Muslim Brotherhood. All these differences between the two countries have consequences for the different possible solutions to current situation. Algeria seems better placed (or less misplaced) to meet these challenges, at least in the short term. Economic, political and social reforms, coordinated from within seem to have more possibilities in Algeria. In contrast, in Egypt the confrontation between ‘the movement’ and the ‘anti-revolutionary’ reactionary bloc seems to have become inexorably worse.

The issue of democratic politicization is, in any case, in Algeria and Egypt as elsewhere in the world, the core of the challenge.

The imperialist powers have not renounced their desire to destroy the conquests of the Algerian people. They had, for this purpose, supported the FIS, who tried to re-emerge on the occasion of the ‘Arab Spring’ by calling for demonstrations supposedly against high prices, a call that had no resonance. We even saw the intervention by the police to prevent its leader Belhadj from being lynched by the crowd. But if the ‘Algerian Spring’ still seems to be on the agenda of the probable, the fact remains that this ‘non-event’ was held up by the Western media as a significant event, as stated by Samia Zennadi in her intervention at the Tunis Social Forum on March 25, 2015. The explosion that would erase the gains of the past and restore the imperialist order is still expected ... and has been since September 1962.

Algeria and Egypt are two magisterial examples of the impotence hitherto of their societies to face the challenge. Algeria and Egypt are the two Arab countries that are potential candidates for being considered as ‘emerging’. The major responsibility for failing to become so lies certainly with the ruling classes and their existing power systems. But also the societies, their intellectuals, their activists and their movements in struggle, share the responsibility in this failure to move ahead.

## **The geostrategy of the United States in trouble**

One will have seen in the preceding pages how the interactions work between on the one hand the various kinds of movements in which the Arab peoples organize and, on the other, the interventions of the United States through which it seeks to give expression to the geopolitical strategies they are trying to implement in the region.

The objective of the global and regional geostrategy of the United States is to destroy the states and societies that would threaten— or could threaten— the exclusive domination by Washington (and, behind them, their subaltern allies in Europe and Japan) over the entire planet. The opponents of this goal are potentially all countries of the South and of the former Soviet Union. And in this context, the US does not hesitate to use preventive wars and conspiracies, and the massacre of hundreds of thousands of human beings. This therefore makes it the number one rogue state, whose leaders are major war criminals and perpetrators of crimes against humanity in the contemporary world.

The regions envisaged as being the primary place for the implementation of this geostrategy are the Asia / Pacific and the Greater Middle East regions.

The United States know that their main adversary is China. China has taken the initiative in implementing its own strategy of emergence in the field of economic development, thereby avoiding the nuclear arms race that the US had imposed on the Soviet Union. I refer the reader here to Barthélémy Courmont compelling book (*Une guerre pacifique*, ESKA 2014). And this ‘soft’ Cold War that China has chosen gives them, hitherto, considerable advantage for becoming the leading world economic power. The United States are thus forced to contain the possible advances of their major opponent by building a wall of states that accept their submission to the deployment of American geostrategy in the Asia / Pacific region. This block includes a major subordinate ally, Japan, which has placed itself voluntarily in this posture, as has Europe, an important potential ally (India), and the neutralized or destroyed states of Southeast Asia. The strengthening of US military presence in the Indian Ocean (Diego Garcia), the Western Pacific (Guam), South Korea and elsewhere through establishing comprehensive land base, completes the tableau.

It is said that because the United States knows that China is their major opponent, they recently decided to focus less on the Middle East and more on Asia. This is only partially true. Yes, perhaps, the United States, finding it more and more difficult to bear the huge cost of their growing military presence in both regions, are forced to transfer part of their western intervention budgets eastward. But there is no question of them withdrawing from the Middle East, especially since the region borders the South of Russia, which is possibly in the throes of re-emergence. The Western intervention in Ukraine must therefore be considered as part of the deployment of American geostrategy in the Greater Middle East.

The geostrategy of the United States has set its goal in the Greater Middle East the annihilating of any resistance capacity of a number of potentially dangerous states, primarily Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Algeria and Iran. And so far, Washington has not given up this goal, which implies the permanence of its presence and its activities in the region. Washington has, to this end, four allies: the two staunchest allies (Israel and

Turkey, an important NATO member), the constellation of Arab Gulf states led by Saudi Arabia, and finally even within the societies concerned, reactionary political Islam (the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafists and Jihadists). The interventions of the four allies allow the implementation of the geostrategy of the destruction of a number of states and societies of the region.

Two societies in the region have already been destroyed: those of Somalia and Libya. Both countries now ‘wiped off the map of nations’, are stateless, handed over to the warlords, in good part comprising Jihadis and major players in regional terrorism, such as the attacks of Al Shabbab in Kenya, and the intervention of Jihadis in Mali and Niger, finding in Libya weapons and refuge. The intervention, conducted deliberately for this purpose was relatively easy, because the fragility of national construction in the two countries. A similar fate threatens Sudan.

The Iraq of Saddam Hussein had constituted a major objective of the devastatingly criminal deployment of the US plan. And the decision to intervene for this purpose had been decided and planned well before the first intervention during the Kuwait war (1991) that were followed by the aggression of 2003, on the grounds of impeding the weapons of mass destruction. The deliberate lies of the Secretary of State, Colin Powell, should have resulted in his appearance before the so-called International Criminal Court (ICC) for his crimes against humanity. But the ICC has only the right to condemn the poor wretches of Serbia and Africa, never the major criminals of the contemporary world. Most African and other states are thus left wanting to quit this farce of justice.

Iraq's infrastructure and industries were deliberately destroyed, its museums ransacked, its elites systematically massacred on orders from Washington. Iraq no longer exists: four caricature states were put in place by Paul Bremer (the US Gauleiter<sup>1</sup>) with the intention of creating permanent civil war between Shiites and Sunnis, Arabs and Kurds. To this end the US armies have protected those who subsequently had to take the direction of the Daesh<sup>2</sup> (or ISIL), the Caliph himself!

Nevertheless, the success of this geostrategy that sows death, produced a situation that allows Iran to penetrate the region, supporting the Shiites in Iraq and elsewhere. Washington should have known. And, if we assume that its leaders are smart enough (the hypothesis is mine) to have known, why then have they ventured there? The reason is that the United States thought that, in the aftermath, they could destroy Iran in its turn, which was what the Gulf States and Israel encouraged them to do. The case of the Iranian nuclear threat was invented for this purpose. But the resistance of Tehran, supported by Russia and China that weakened the impact of sanctions, forced Washington to retreat.

It was then that the US has implemented their plan B: weaken Iran before attacking it frontally and destroying its Syrian ally. The false ‘Syrian Spring’ was coined for this

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<sup>1</sup> A *Gauleiter* was the party leader of a regional branch of the Nazi Party, appointed directly by the Führer.

<sup>2</sup> Daesh is also an acronym for an Arabic variation of the *al-Dawla al-Islamiya fil Iraq wa'al Sham*. In the English language media they are referred variously as ISIS or ISIL.



purpose based on the Libyan model, as I mentioned above. But again Syria, Iran, Russia and China have managed to thwart this geostrategy. The Syrian army has not fallen apart. To seriously threaten it, it required bringing to the Daesh the support (arms and financing) by some Gulf countries, without which his Caliphate would not have emerged. To advance their plan, the US has relied on the intervention of their Turkish ally, that has become Islamist in turn (under Erdogan), and the support of the European diplomats at their service (that of France being the in the first line), and that of Israel.

The geostrategy of the United States is clearly in trouble. They are thus forced to make a tactical retreat on Iran and Syria. The statements of John Kerry, renouncing the designation of Bashar al-Assad as the primary enemy to be defeated (march 2015) testifies to this tactical retreat. Simultaneously in the same month of March, the US agreed to discuss the nuclear issue with Teheran (I refer here to the Lausanne Agreement). With great intelligence, Tehran understood that its eventual access to the production of a few atomic bombs (in contrast to the over two hundred possessed by Israel)—in addition to the impossibility of keeping the secret—would serve as a pretext for an open aggression against it, Israel then getting the green light to nuclear bombing of Iran. But on its side, Washington has not lost hope of buying the Iranian ruling class, inviting it to operate in the region as a 'normal' actor, that is to say ultimately subservient to the US. This class, which as in Egypt and elsewhere, cannot imagine relinquishing economic liberalism, could find its reward—that is to say, its own enrichment, not that of its people—in the removal of sanctions and would be welcomed on world markets. Iran could then withdraw its support for Syria, hopes Washington, and the offensive to destroy this country could be revived. But this is only one possible scenario among others. In contrast, Iran could persevere in its project to become an independent player in the region, approaching the BRICS and forcing Washington to accept it as such. The Lausanne Agreement has nevertheless raised the ire of Israel, the Europeans who unconditionally support the Zionist state, and the Gulf States. Certainly these stooges (Israel, France, the Gulf) know they cannot take bold initiatives without a green light from Washington. But they are nonetheless upset. For the accepted return of Iran as a regional player ruins the hopes of the Gulf of being alone authorized to exercise control over the Strait of Hormuz under the military protection of the United States.

The new Yemeni war and the military intervention of Saudi Arabia from the end of March 2015 was invented to heat up the conflict with Iran, accused, without proof, of wanting to install a Shiite power in Yemen (Shiites are the majority in the country). The case is more complex. The man put in place by Washington and Riyadh, Ali Abdullah Saleh, had never been able to convince the heads of tribes and clans, Shiites or Sunnis, nor the militants in the south, of his legitimacy. I refer the reader to Chapter IV of this book regarding the reasons for the suicide of the South in the name of unity of Yemen. Certainly, the permanent chaos in Yemen does not bother the Western powers for whom only the military security in Aden matters. But this chaos bothers Saudi Arabia because it permits refuge for the Wahhabi Salafists who dare to want to release Wahhabism of Saudi tutelage, as I have mentioned earlier.

Has Erdogan's Turkey descend into the neo-Ottoman and Islamist demented grandiloquence? I refer the reader here to the analysis I have proposed for the reasons for the failure of the project for the emergence of Turkey, at its heart in the success of

Islamists (see *The implosion of contemporary capitalism*, Chapter 2). Turkey's active intervention in Syria, in support of Jihadists and Daesh (among others by facilitating the transit of Jihadists from Tunisia and Europe and providing arms as established by the newspaper *Cumhuriyet* in May 2015), and approved by Washington and Europe, are part of this plan. For here also the semi-theocratic and hardening fascist project is necessary to enable the only card that the imperialist powers can play in this country located on the edge of Europe, Russia, the Arab Mashreq and Iran. The reason is simply that the growing resistance of the Turkish people to the neo-fascist trends could open the way for what Westerners fear most: the commitment of Turkey to leave the path of lumpen-development generated by economic liberalism (the condition among others for entry into the European Union), and establish a rapprochement with BRICS: in other words, the option for a real – and possible – political emergence of the Turkish nation. The ball is now in the court of a radical left which is still embryonic. For a replay of the days of Ataturk here is also as difficult to imagine as a replay of Nasserism in Egypt, and for the same reasons. In contrast, a consequential left could give the general democratic movement that is emerging the strategic organization that it currently lacks. It is necessary here, and elsewhere, that the radical left understands that only audacity pays in a polarizing situation provoked by far-right politics.

Egypt, on which I devoted most of the text, remains the key to the Arab world. The geostrategy of USA has thus made its major objective the annihilation of the real potential for the emergence of Egypt. To this end, Plan A of Washington counted on the Muslim Brotherhood, whose theocratic project would have effectively guaranteed the triumph of US, Gulf and Israeli objectives. And although the Egyptian people have routed the Muslim Brotherhood, Washington certainly has not given up this plan. But in the absence of anything better, the United States could shelter behind their Plan B whose success they hope for, for the short-term and visible future at least: the return to the original point of departure, that is to say, the economic and political system of the time of Sadat and Mubarak. Having then renounced the desire to leave the beaten tracks of imperialist globalization, Egypt would be doomed to insignificance. It would then be kept alive – with its head just above water— by the Gulf financial pump and the corrupting ‘aid’ of the US, nothing more.

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