

CounterPunch

FEB. 16-28, 2011

ALEXANDER COCKBURN AND JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

VOL. 18, NO. 4

1952 and After Earthquakes for Sixty Years

By Vijay Prashad

Sounds of cheers from Tahrir Square and Tunis' City Hall Monument traveled across the planet via *Al-Jazeera*, but so, too, did the sounds of gunfire from the Pearl Street roundabout in Manama, Bahrain, and from the streets of central Tripoli, Libya. The ouster of Ben Ali and Mubarak came with hundreds dead, and hundreds more died in the ongoing struggles in Libya and Bahrain.

Washington walked into the Arab revolt of 2011 with two lead feet. Ben Ali, Mubarak, King al-Khalifa and Gaddafi have been loyal allies in the War on Terror against al-Qaeda and its tentacles, and in the war against Iran and its proxies. Opposition to these centurions of "stability" was brushed off as the conspiracies of fanatic Islamic factions. Founded in 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood renounced violence in the 1980s, but the mere existence of the Brotherhood was sufficient to allow "human rights" defenders in Washington, London, Paris and Rome to embrace the autocratic leaders of North Africa and the Gulf.

Geopolitical ambitions easily overcame any dedication to values of human dignity. Political scientists whose writings are legible to Washington bureaucrats have long divided the Middle East along a simple cardinal line: the status quo powers and the revisionist powers. The status quo powers are those who enable the imperial interests of the Euro-American capitals, and the revisionists are those who threaten these interests.

From 1952 to 1979, the principle status quo power in the Middle East was Iran, with the shah as the bastion against the Arab renaissance, under the star of

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Rendering the Dictator's Manual Inoperable The Great Arab Revolutions of 2011

By Esam Al-Amin

The Arab revolutions erupting since late last year have each been marked by their own unique features. Although the declared goals of each revolution have yet to be fully realized, their primary objective of overthrowing authoritarian rulers was spectacularly achieved within a historically short period of time.

While it took 28 days of continuous protests to depose the dictator of Tunisia, a country of 10 million people, it required only 18 days of massive demonstrations to accomplish the same feat in Egypt, which has a population of 85 million.

On February 15 in Libya, a largely desert and tribal country of 6 million, people marched to free an attorney, Fathi Terbil, who was arrested for representing the families of political prisoners at Abu Salim prison in the eastern city of Benghazi. Previously, in June 1996, the regime had gunned down 1,200 prisoners who were political opponents of the government. After a longstanding policy of blaming the victims, the regime did not acknowledge this crime until 2004. As people were demanding the release of Terbil in a peaceful demonstration, the security forces started shooting at the protesters, killing and injuring many of them.

Two days later, encouraged by Egypt's revolution, an uprising erupted in Benghazi protesting the brutality of the regime. It has since rapidly spread throughout the country. At the time of writing, the Libyan dictator has lost much of his nation and is now besieged in his fortified compound in the capital, Tripoli, trying desperately to hold on to power.

Similar uprisings have broken out in Jordan, Algeria, Yemen, Bahrain, Morocco and Iraq. Other countries such

as Sudan and Mauritania are on the brink. In short, most Arab countries, including long-established monarchies such as Saudi Arabia, are threatened with widespread popular uprisings that would drastically change the strategic power structure in the region.

The spark for Tunisia's revolution was Mohammad Bouazizi setting himself ablaze in the southern city of Sidi Bouzid on December 17, 2010, protesting against the authorities who insulted him and seized his sole means of sustenance.

The downfall of Zein al-Abideen Ben Ali's regime in Tunisia on January 14 was itself the spark for the Egyptian revolution, which erupted eleven days later. By February 11, the Egyptian regime had also collapsed when its head, Hosni Mubarak, was forced to resign in disgrace after much obstinate and arrogant behavior. Within days, Mubarak's fall set off several uprisings across the Arab world demanding the downfall of several regimes, particularly in Libya, Bahrain and Yemen.

Clearly, there are many shared features among Arab regimes, but the most common is their authoritarian nature, regardless of whether the regime is officially a monarchy or a republic. All dictators have ruled their subjects with repression and brute force. Ben Ali ruled Tunisia for 23 years, while Mubarak's tyranny lasted for 30 years in Egypt. Muammar Qaddafi has been Libya's despot for more than 41 years; Ali Abdullah Salih has been Yemen's absolute autocrat for 33 years.

The Sunni family in Bahrain, the Al Khalifa, has ruled Bahrain and its Shi'a majority since the 18th century. The prime minister, who is the uncle of the current king, has been in this position for four decades. Likewise, the Saudi royal family has been ruling the country without much participation of its 26 million

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people for almost eight decades.

Whether the country is a wealthy oil producer, such as Libya and Saudi Arabia, or struggling economically, like Tunisia and Egypt, poverty, illiteracy, and lack of basic infrastructure, such as health care, education, electricity, or a sewage system, are pervasive. Last year, for instance, many people died in Jeddah, the second largest city in Saudi Arabia, because of the lack of the necessary infrastructure to handle heavy rain, despite the country's vast wealth.

Moreover, large-scale corruption and accumulation of the country's wealth in the hands of the ruling elites are common characteristics across these regimes. All of this wealth could have transformed these societies as far as development and growth. The Saudi royal family, which includes six thousand princes, is said to control over three trillion dollars worldwide.

Invariably, the first reaction to the popular uprising by each regime was to clamp down and use brutal force. The more ruthless the tactics employed by the security forces, the more people became angry and took to the streets raising their demands. The Egyptian regime, similar to others, was always several steps behind the people. As casualties mounted due to the regime's continuous repres-

sion, the protesters persisted on raising their demands. Their first demand was for the deposed president to pledge not to seek re-election nor impose his son as the future president. They also called for the dismissal of his interior minister. As Mubarak ignored their call and released his security forces beating and arresting the protesters, the demands were raised: dismissal of the government, then Mubarak's departure, and, most recently, insistence on putting him and his family on trial.

Elsewhere, when the regimes ignored the demands for dialogue with the opposition by the Yemeni and Bahraini protesters, resorting instead to the security apparatus, causing multiple deaths and hundreds of injuries, the people became enraged. Subsequently, the fall of the Yemeni regime and the Bahraini government became their primary demand.

Similarly, for several weeks people throughout Jordan were protesting and demanding the resignation of the government and the appointment of a national unity government to tackle the country's acute economic problems. By the time the King Abdullah II sacked the government several weeks later and opened dialogue with the opposition, the primary demand has become to change the political system from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional one, where the powers of the king are transferred to an elected government.

It seems that the longer a regime is in power, the more brutal its behavior. The Libyan regime went as far as employing foreign mercenaries to shoot mercilessly at unarmed civilians. As hundreds of casualties mounted, major segments of Libyan society abandoned Qaddafi, including many battalions from the army and the security forces, government officials, diplomats, judges, oil workers, and, most importantly, the major tribes across the country.

Ben Ali, Mubarak, Salih, Qaddafi's son Saif al-Islam, the Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al-Malki, as well as the kings of Bahrain and Jordan, each gave several addresses conceding some of the popular demands in the hope to stem the tide. But, in most cases, the people rejected these belated concessions, demanding revolutionary, fundamental, and far-reaching changes. In Algeria, by the time the regime agreed to lift the 19-year-old state of emergency law, the people's prin-

ciple demand has become regime change.

When the tactics of sticks and carrots fail, the regime turns to the army as a last resort to crack down on the protesters. Although the army of Bahrain viciously attacked the protesters in the streets before withdrawing under pressure, the armies in Tunisia and Egypt refused to do so. In fact, in each case the military announced its support for the people, leaving the despots no choice but to depart from the scene.

The refusal of most armies to support these dictatorial regimes is very significant because it sets a trend. When the people break down the barrier of fear of the regime, no power can stop them until they achieve their demands.

Revolution vs. Counterrevolution

Alexis de Tocqueville once wrote, "In a revolution, as in a novel, the most difficult part to invent is the end." Historians will most likely debate for many years the various factors that came together to set off the uprisings that turned into triumphant revolutions. However, the most significant and distinctive feature in all of them is that they were genuine popular revolutions that were spearheaded by the youth, including as many women as men in participation, sacrifices, and leadership roles.

As the French revolution was unfolding at the end of the 18th century, French philosopher and diplomat Joseph de Maistre wrote, "The counterrevolution will not be a reverse revolution, but the reverse of a revolution." Likewise, the main challenge to the revolutions in Egypt, Tunisia, and elsewhere is that they could be hijacked by counterrevolutionaries tied to the deposed regimes, which would then reverse the revolutions.

So, what are the main challenges posed by counterrevolutionary forces facing the Arab revolutions? People in the Arab world revolted primarily to become free, to restore their dignity, and to regain respect for themselves.

"The dictator has fallen but not the dictatorship," declared Rachid Ghannouchi, the leader of the Tunisian opposition party, al-Nahdha, or Renaissance. Thus, the verdict on the ultimate success of the Tunisian revolution is still out. Will it be aborted by either infighting or the introduction of illusory changes by the counterrevolutionaries of

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the deposed regime to absorb the public's anger? Or will real and lasting change be established, enshrined in a new constitution that is based on democratic principles, political freedom, freedoms of press and assembly, independence of the judiciary, respect of human rights, and the end of foreign interference?

Similarly, after it deposed Mubarak, the prodemocracy movement in Egypt has been demonstrating weekly with its new chant, "The people demand to purify the regime." But to purify the regime, the revolutionaries are demanding that the ruling military council purge many institutions and dismiss many senior people tied to the previous regime. One of the foremost challenges, which the military council has been trying to avoid despite popular calls, is the dismissal of the central government and all the provincial governors, who have strong ties to the previous regime, or showed intense loyalty to Mubarak through his final days. The military council has been wavering on this demand causing much concern about the direction of the country.

Perhaps the major challenges illustrating whether the military is serious about breaking from the past and embracing the goals of the revolution are in three crucial areas. The first challenge is at the security level. The main reason the deposed regime was able to control and dominate the political scene, and rule by instilling fear and repression, is because of the state security apparatus. Until this apparatus is totally dismantled, there is a considerable threat that the revolution could be reversed, or at least hindered to the point of derailing its main objectives. Secondly, major figures in the former ruling party, including corrupt businessmen, are trying to regroup and rebrand themselves as a new pro-revolution and reform party, in an attempt to take over the levers of state power by manipulating the public, using the huge resources at their disposal, and through their internal knowledge of how state institutions operate. Thirdly, none of the pro-regime media officials appointed by Mubarak to the numerous state print and electronic media boards, or outlets, or heads of labor unions has been dismissed. If allowed to stay in power, they would pose a threat to genuine change since, as part of the previous regime, they have every incentive to promote their people to cover up their corrupt practices, even as they

falsely present themselves in the interim as reformers.

In short, like all such moments in history, the Arab revolutions face great challenges. The military will have a say in whether to go forward and propel true reforms, as demanded by each revolution, or slow down and besiege it to accommodate the interests of its opponents. In addition, a central challenge to these popular revolutions will be the external pressures applied by international and regional powers to safeguard their interests and policies, which may diverge from or conflict with the interests and wishes of the vast majority of the Arab people. For instance, Egyptians overwhelmingly want to lift the siege on Gaza that the deposed regime helped maintain. They also want to help the Palestinian factions reach reconciliation and end their divisions. Both objectives are strongly opposed by the U.S.A. and Israel.

Alexis de Tocqueville once wrote, "In a revolution, as in a novel, the most difficult part to invent is the end."

Hence, the assertion of each revolution's independence in the face of certain Western pressures would represent the ultimate test to the success of the revolutions. If the future governments of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, or any other Arab country transformed by its revolution or genuine reform truly reflect the will of their people in internal as well as external policies, then the revolutions have, indeed, succeeded. If not, then somewhere along the way counterrevolutionary elements would have hijacked it, setting the stage for another corrective revolution.

The ultimate lesson to Western policymakers is this: real change is the product of popular will and sacrifice, not of foreign interference or invasions. To topple the Iraqi dictator, it cost the U.S.A. over 4,500 dead soldiers, 32,000 injured, a trillion dollars, a sinking economy, at least 150,000 dead Iraqis, a half-million injured, and the devastation of their country, as well as the enmity of billions of Muslims and other people around the world. Eight years after the U.S. invasion,

the Iraqi people not only suffer from a lack of genuine democracy and the problem of widespread corruption, but also from the lack of real security and basic services. On February 25, the American-backed Iraqi government just shot dead ten people who were protesting its corruption and cronyism.

Only the vigilance of the revolutionary forces in society and their insistence on achieving their main objectives will determine the destiny and ultimate success of these revolutions. As they were launched in the streets and squares, the Arab revolutions of 2011 might be destined to stay in the streets for some time to face off against the counterrevolutionaries, until every challenge has met its response and every objective has become a reality.

In his farewell address in 1837, President Andrew Jackson said it best when he reminded his people that "eternal vigilance by the people is the price of liberty," and that one "must pay the price" in order "to secure the blessing." CP

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**Published twice monthly
except July and August,
22 issues a year.**

1 - year hardcopy edition \$45
2 - year hardcopy edition \$80
1 - year email edition \$35
2 - year email edition \$65
1 - year email & hardcopy edition \$50
1 - year institutions/supporters \$100
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PRASHAD CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Gamal Abdel Nasser, whose Free Officers coup of 1952 sent violent tremors through the Arab world. The creation of the United Arab Republic (Egypt and Syria) in February 1958 pushed Lebanon into almost terminal civil chaos in May, and in July the Iraqi Free Officers overthrew their feeble king. Inside the palaces of Saudi Arabia, the Free Princes movement formed a battalion to diminish the autocracy of King Saud. The fusion of Egypt with Syria was not a progressive action in itself. It was done, largely, to eliminate the dynamic Communist Party and the pro-Communist General Afif al-Bizri. The anti-Communism of Nasser was not sufficient to ingratiate him with the bureaucrats in Washington. They despised his anti-imperialism and, later, his unrelenting position on Israel. To be a status quo power, then, it was necessary to be a defender of the interests of Washington and London (with Paris in tow) and to be an ally of Israel's erratic strategy for its singular objective. The Shah of Iran stood fast against Nasserism.

A series of geopolitical earthquakes destroyed this strategy. The first took place in 1973, when the Yom Kippur War turned out to be a fiasco for the Arab states. Sadat had already turned his back on Nasser's economic and political policies in 1971, foreign investment was being courted, and Egypt's constitution adopted a more Islamic tone. Sadat turned tail in March 1979 at Camp David, where he accepted an annual American bribe for a peace treaty with Israel. Sadat took home the Nobel Prize for Peace, which went on the altar of the new dispensation. A few months before, Reza Pahlavi, the deposed shah of Iran, arrived at Aswan, Egypt, to begin his long exile around the world before he returned to Egypt and was ultimately buried in Al Rifa'i mosque. The shah's departure from Iran and Sadat's return from Camp David set in motion the new alliances. Washington now saw Iran under the mullahs as the leading revisionist power. The bulwark for the United States and Israel was now Sadat's Egypt and Saddam Hussein's Iraq, which was hastily dispatched to begin hostilities against Iran.

Washington's steady allies before and after this cataclysmic shift remained Saudi Arabia, and its satellite Gulf emirates. The Saudis' deal with the U.S.A. goes back to the 1950s, when the steady

stream of oil from the Gulf sea lanes to the gas stations of the heartland was guaranteed as long as the U.S.A. pledged to protect the shaky monarchies from their hostile neighborhood, and their often hostile populations (by the Saudi Arabian National Guard, heavily armed and often trained by the United States). Nasserism came into the palaces with the Free Princes, who were ejected to exile in Beirut. Then, after 1979, an older danger threatened the royals. The working class in eastern Saudi Arabia and in the cities that run from Kuwait to Muscat along the eastern rim of the peninsula is mainly Shi'a. Oil-worker protests in Qatif (also called Little Najaf, the religious city in Iraq) date back to the emergence of the oil industry in the kingdom. In 1979,

Washington walked into the Arab revolt of 2011 with two lead feet. The risings in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya and elsewhere have thrown the geopolitical equation into disarray.

after the Iranian Revolution, the workers in the area once more went out on strike but were beaten back ferociously.

Since 1979, any attempt to move a democratic agenda forward in the Arab world has been tarred with the brush of Iranianism, what is generally called "Islamic fundamentalism." However, neither militant Islam or autocracy worry the planners of the world order. If that was the case, they should be apoplectic about the Saudi monarchy, whose sharia laws would make the Iranian mullahs blush. What drives Langley and the Harold Pratt House crazy is the issue of Iranian influence, and, so, of the revision of the power equation in the Middle East. These intellectual bureaucrats try to stretch Shi'ism over the gigantic body of the Arab world. Hamas and Hezbollah are entirely treated as Iranian mailboxes in Palestine and Lebanon respectively.

The Iranian Revolution certainly gave the historically oppressed Shi'a population of the Arabian Peninsula courage to call for self-respect. Eager to live dignified lives, these populations took refuge

in religious organizations that provided them with a framework to make their call for dignity comprehensible. Bahrain's Al Wafaq National Islamic Society is, as a U.S. State Department cable candidly noted (September 4, 2008), neither a fundamentalist nor a sectarian party, but it "continues to demand a 'true' constitutional monarchy in which elected officials make policy decisions, the prime minister is accountable to the parliament, and the appointed upper house loses its legislative power." These are elementary, civic claims. But they cannot be honored because they come from Al Wafaq against the power of a king, who allows the U.S.A. to base its Fifth Fleet in his archipelago and who is fiercely against Iran. It is far easier to tar parties like Al Wafaq as Iran's proxies, and to categorize the simple demands of the people for dignity as "the Shi'a revival."

The risings in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya and elsewhere have thrown the geopolitical equation into disarray. If Hosni Mubarak looked out of his villa in Sharm el-Sheikh a few days after his arrival there on February 11, he might have seen two Iranian vessels (a frigate and a supply ship) passing, as they swept around the bend at Ras Mohammed, up the Gulf of Suez and across into the Mediterranean Sea through the canal. These two ships docked in Syria on February 24. The fact that Egypt would allow the Iranians to use the canal for the first time since the 1979 revolution threatens the architecture of U.S. power in the region.

Alireza Nader, of RAND, told the *New York Times*, "I think the Saudis are worried that they're encircled – Iraq, Syria, Lebanon; Yemen is unstable; Bahrain is very uncertain." The U.S. war in Iraq handed the country over to a pro-Iranian regime. In late January, the Hezbollah-backed candidate (Najib Mikati) became prime minister of Lebanon, and Hamas' hands were strengthened as the Palestine Authority's remaining legitimacy came crashing down when *Al-Jazeera* published the Palestine Papers. Ben Ali and Mubarak's exile threw Tunisia and Egypt out of the column of the status quo states. Libya's Qaddafi and Yemen's Saleh have been loyal allies in the War on Terror.

As the status quo withered, its loyal dogs tried out the old chant about the

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Why Madison Matters

Endgame of the Reagan Revolution

By Andrew Levine

I arrived in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1974, when a few dying embers were still left over from the glory days of the anti-war movement. Before long, little more than nostalgia remained. To be sure, a remnant of a radical student and ex-student subculture survives to this day. But the obsession with *Ordnung* and propriety that had always shaped Madison's ambient culture swamped lingering rebellious inclinations. Goody-goodyism reigned.

The reality behind the nostalgia, in Madison and countless other locales, was a student movement that took shape as conscription threatened. Workers were mainly on the other side, and efforts to turn the student movement into a broader youth movement were, for the most part, failures. To a degree that is difficult to imagine nowadays, the movement was lily white, though hardly by choice. African Americans in revolt had their own problems and their own agendas; and, in any case, in Madison persons of color, as they were not yet called, were few and far between.

The working class was a different world too, and the movement's counter-cultural affinities exaggerated the divide. In Madison, because teaching assistants had won (limited) collective bargaining rights on the shoulders of the anti-war movement and because there was a faculty union, formed back in the Thirties, that had loyal adherents but no chance of winning over a majority of faculty members, there were formal ties with the American Federation of Teachers. But at an organic level, organized labor – including unions that organized campus workers – had almost as little time for student radicals as did SNCC or later the Black Panthers.

Much has changed over the past four decades, thanks mainly to factors only tenuously connected to Sixties politics. Multiracial coalitions have become the norm, and there is no longer palpable hostility between workers and students.

Still, as recently as early February, the very idea of workers and students struggling together for progressive change, with labor in the lead, seemed as far-fetched as ever.

Then, almost overnight, the world changed. Madison became Ground Zero in America's domestic class struggle; and, just as amazing, labor launched an uprising in defense of union rights which

Almost overnight, the world changed. Madison became Ground Zero in America's domestic class struggle; and, just as amazing, labor launched an uprising in defense of union rights which thousands of students joined.

thousands of students joined. The Sixties was a worldwide phenomenon; recent events are taking on a similar character. From the Middle East to the Midwest, it is as if the world has entered into a new phase.

It has gotten to the point that even the so-called liberal media – NPR, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* – can't bury news of it. Fortunately, though, the liberal press now has a liberal wing – at MSNBC, for a couple of hours on weekday evenings. Thanks to Rachel Maddow, Ed Schultz and others, a genuinely liberal account of the events now unfolding has taken root. This is a welcome development. Not surprisingly, though, the liberal version misses the main point.

Liberals look at Wisconsin – and similar struggles now underway in Indiana, Ohio, New Jersey, Idaho and elsewhere – and see Republicans on the attack.

The Supreme Court's *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* ruling of January 2010 gave corporations and labor unions *carte blanche* to buy elections; were the unions gone, that would leave just the corporations. And with private sector unions on the skids, especially after NAFTA and other Clinton era attacks, public sector unions are all that stand in the way of unbridled corporate dominance of a political system where money almost always prevails. Since corporations generally prefer Republicans to Democrats (notwithstanding the corporate money that flowed into Obama's coffers in 2008), Republicans have much to gain, and Democrats much to lose, if Wisconsin's Tea Party governor, Scott Walker, gets his way.

In recent days, Democrats in Wisconsin and other states have shown that, when pushed, they can do the right thing. It's another story entirely at the national level. Indeed, it is hard to understand how anyone who has been sensate over the past two years could regret misfortunes befalling the national Democratic Party. Nevertheless, many liberals, including the ones at MSNBC, still do. They are not wrong: the Democrats are the lesser evil of our two semi-official parties, and however much Obama ignores the interests of his core constituencies, including labor, whoever runs against him is likely to be worse.

But this is hardly the main thing at stake in Wisconsin and elsewhere. As the struggle to retain collective bargaining rights intensifies, it is becoming clearer, especially in labor circles, that its Democrats versus Republicans aspect is only secondary to a larger assault by capital on labor. This matters more than how Democrats and Republicans fare in upcoming elections or whether Barack Obama wins another term.

What is at stake is the endgame of the so-called Reagan revolution. In a world where liberals are no longer particularly bothered by increasingly savage inequalities, or by Obama – a Nobel Peace laureate who wages multiple self-defeating wars of choice, a Constitutional Law professor who continues Bush era attacks on the rule of law (while protecting Bush era war criminals from being brought to justice), a community organizer who stifles efforts to relieve poverty (disingenuously, in the name of cutting budget deficits) – a full consummation of the Reaganite

program is not far off. A victorious assault on organized labor would settle the matter once and for all. Fortunately for all of us, this is an outcome workers – or, as liberals now say, the middle class – cannot abide. Scott Walker and his ilk know what the stakes are. Thanks to his predations, workers and their allies now know too.

But even this is not the main reason why Madison matters. It isn't just unions that Walker and his fellow Tea Partiers want to undo – it is public sector unions. This matters for reasons that are related to many of our current afflictions – the financialization of contemporary capitalism, the globalization of manufacturing and trade, and, more generally, the worldwide assault on social and economic advances gained at great cost over the past century and a half. The problem, in short, is that in order to survive, capitalism must expand – and, with so few areas left for expansion, the public sphere has become a target too tempting to resist. This is why capitalists have set their sights on institutions like public schools that have so far avoided thoroughgoing commodification, that still provide goods and services not to enrich capitalists or to expand their power but for the sake of the common good. What is under attack is the public sphere itself. Public unions are its first (and last?) line of defense.

No one these days protects public provision more than the providers themselves. With public education under attack from all sides (including Obama's), it is appropriate that teachers are in the forefront of the struggle to save collective bargaining rights for public employees in Wisconsin. Of course, they care about their own well-being. But they also care about public education – because this is where our civic life and our unity as a people have been formed for generations, and because they understand that there is no way that private enterprise can sustain these vital functions satisfactorily. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, and Barack Obama, like George Bush before them, are not on the same page. What matters to them is just that, one way or another, American capitalists get the kinds of workers they want.

No one knows how the events taking place in Madison will unfold, just as no one knows what will happen in the coming months and years in the Middle East. Our institutions make it difficult

for popular uprisings to win out over obdurate political establishments. All we, the people, can do in a “democracy” like ours is replace legislators and presidents every two or four years by voting them in or out of office. This is seldom enough to win the day when economic elites have different ideas, especially when those elites are able to insure that we face only Coke versus Pepsi choices. This is why Walker could win this time around, even

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threat of Islamic Fundamentalism. Mubarak's chorus about the Muslim Brotherhood was off key. When Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi returned from his exile in Qatar, he did not play the part of Khomeini. The sheikh opened his sermon in Tahrir Square with a welcome to both Muslims and Christians. Qaddafi's shrieks about a potential al-Qaeda in the Maghreb being formed in the eastern part of Libya repeated the paranoid delusions of the AFRICOM planners. Rumors leaked out of Tripoli that Qaddafi had released his Salafi prisoners towards the east, hoping that their presence would give him a pretext to convert the strafing of his citizenry into an airborne assault for the Global War on Terror. Bahrain's Hamad al-Khalifa hastened to kiss the hem of King Abdullah's substantial jalabiya, and to plot together about the Shi'a challenge to the Sunni monarchs. They wish to transfer their sectarian histrionics onto their dissenting populations, but Al-Wafeq's Khalil Ibrahim al-Marzooq quickly warned that the Saudis might try to flood Bahrain with the kind of mercenary thugs that they sent into Yemen to disrupt the Marxist republic in the 1970s.

In 2008, during the armed confrontation between the Lebanese government and Hezbollah, the Saudi Foreign

Minister Saud al-Faisal met with the U. S. Ambassador David Satterfield. Saud feared an “Iranian takeover of all Lebanon.” He wanted armed intervention. The Lebanese Armed Forces were not up to the task. Nor was the U.N. force in south Lebanon, “which is sitting doing nothing.” What was needed was for the U.S.A. and NATO to provide “naval and air cover” and for an “Arab force” drawn from the “Arab periphery.” It did not come to pass. But the idea percolates through Riyadh's palaces. Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Mike Mullen probably heard it during his trip to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

as his popularity plummets and as support for union busting declines. All that can be said with certainty is that, miraculously, a threshold has been crossed, and the world has changed. The way forward is anything but assured, but at long last hope really is once again alive – not in the fatuous sense that voters once projected onto the Rorschach candidacy of Barack Obama but because what Isaac Deutscher, some 40 years ago (during Madison's last Golden Age) called “that great sleeping giant,” the American working class, is finally beginning to stir. CP

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The status quo powers fear the revision of the power equation on the Middle East chessboard. The tremors from below have undone their stability. CP

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Balkanization and its Discontents

U.S.A.'s Doomed Afghan Plan

By Shaukat Qadir

In the corridors of power in Washington, D.C., one hot topic is the balkanization of Afghanistan; the debate is being led by Robert Blackwill, former U.S. ambassador to India. It would be no surprise if Mr. Blackwill also had some Indian interests in mind while making this proposal. Is this proposition feasible, or is the U.S. missing something? Fuelling such plans is growing awareness in Washington of the likelihood that the use of force in Afghanistan has proved unsuccessful, and the U.S.A. is highly unlikely to emerge with anything akin to success when it leaves.

While the ostensible reasoning in support of this plan is that, once Afghanistan is divided, even a return of the Taliban would be reduced to the Pashtun-dominated south and, thus, the Taliban threat would be contained, the idea behind it is that if the U.S.A. fails to benefit from its misadventure in Afghanistan, it should, at the very least, deny that benefit to any other interested party. Were such a plan to succeed as an end-game product, it would certainly achieve both ends: the ostensible one and the hidden one; but can it?

The logic of dividing Afghanistan is based on three premises: a) that there was no such country as Afghanistan until Russia and Britain decided to create it in 1893 to contain the ambitious Turk, Yaqub Beg, in Turkestan (Kashgar), who dreamed aloud of a united "Greater Turkestan" extending from the Caucasus to present-day Turkey, and also as a buffer between the two, Russia and the British Empire; b) that current Taliban support is confined to the Pashtun-dominated south; and c) that, based on the premise of a) and b) above, a division on ethnic lines would be acceptable to all.

All three premises are inaccurate if not totally false.

The first premise is manifestly false. The part of the world known as Afghanistan today had its birth in the early 18th century. In 1747, as the Mongol Empire began to fall apart, one of its ambitious and gifted governors, Ahmed Shah Durrani, decided to establish his own empire. Starting from the modern-

day Central Asia, he carved one out. It included Afghanistan, modern-day Pakistan, extending well into modern-day India and Iran. Kandahar was his capital. His descendants, the various offshoots of the Durrani tribes, are still acknowledged by many Afghans as the rightful heirs to his kingdom. As an interesting aside, Mullah Muhammed Omar, the famous Taliban leader; Hamid Karzai, Afghanistan's puppet president today; and Mulla Abdul Ghani Baradar, former second in command to Mullah Omar – all hail from the Popalzai branch of the Durrani tribe, claiming to be direct descendants of the Emperor Ahmed Shah

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Durrani.

By 1893, Durrani's Empire had disintegrated, but Afghanistan continued to exist and, at the time, claimed most of the territory that is the Tribal Area of Pakistan today. Its reigning king, Abdur Rahman, had, however, been captured by the Russians. He was released following the Russo-British agreement in 1893. The Durand Line, however, was, indeed, an arbitrarily drawn line dividing Afghanistan and British India, bordering the region called now Pakistan – agreed upon by Russia and Britain and imposed on Afghanistan. Afghanistan has disputed the Durand Line since its creation.

Now, let us examine the second and third premise, since they are mutually interdependent. While the Taliban are, indeed, entirely Pashtun and Mullah Muhammed Omar as well as many of

his supporters hail from Kandahar in the south of Afghanistan, neither the Pashtun nor Taliban support is confined to the south.

Qunduz, a Pashtun-dominated region, lies to the extreme north, dividing the Tajiks and Uzbeks of Afghanistan, and bordering Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Herat, west of the center of Afghanistan, bordering the Pashtun south, is Dari speaking, non-Pashtun. The provinces of Logar, Nangarhar, Paktia, immediately south and east of Kabul, are Pashtun-dominated, though Logar houses a large number of Tajiks as well. West and north of Kabul, Jalalabad and the region bordering Pakistan is also Pashtun.

The bulk of the Hazara tribe lives in central Afghanistan, though they remain a minority in every province. The Hazaras, almost exclusively of the Shi'a sect, have always been looked down upon by the Pashtun and yet predominantly Pashtun, Sunni Afghanistan has historically hosted peoples of virtually all religions. Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs and Parsis, have all lived there happily, the exception being Jews and Hindus. The arrival of the Taliban, of course, changed the acceptance of this religious diversity. The historical exclusion of the Hindus is almost amusing, since offshoots of Hinduism like Buddhists were acceptable. When asked, the Afghan Pashtun just shrugs, "You can never trust a Hindu; a Budh is not Hindu!"

What is important to register is that, despite the ethno-religious diversity, there has always been a peculiar homogeneity amongst the Afghans, who pride themselves on being Afghans. After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the USSR attempted to get the Afghan Uzbeks and Tajiks to revolt and to join the countries of their ethnic origin, and failed. What is more, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Pashtun in Qunduz allied themselves with that famous Tajik general, Ahmed Shah Masood, better known as "The Lion of Panjshir."

Burhannuddin Rabbani, who heads the Afghan High Council for Peace and is the only Tajik veteran of the Afghan-Soviet war era to have kept contacts with some Taliban, addressed a Pashtun Jirga in Nangarhar (a Taliban infested region) and said words to the effect that "this is your country – our country" and "we have all made mistakes that we need to

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learn from”; most significantly, the Jirga concluded that negotiations with Taliban should be opened and “they should have the opportunity of negotiating with fellow Afghans to the exclusion of Americans!” Does this sound like a house divided, or one that wants to be divided, or even one that will readily accept a division imposed upon it?

A middle-aged shopkeeper from Jalalabad, belonging to the middle class prior to the Soviet education – let us call him Mohsin Khan – is short, cherubic and cheerful; far from the image of the tall, well-built, sturdy Afghan warrior, though appearances can frequently be deceptive. Mohsin is a typical make-no-waves middle-class person found the world over. His only son is studying in the U.S.A., and his daughter in a Pakistani university. His father was killed late 2009 by U.S. forces, “accidentally.” Talking of the Taliban, he had this to say to me, “When they arrived in 1995 in Jalalabad, we accepted them, since they promised us justice and an end to the chaos that existed. When they began showing their true colors, we endured them and, when the U.S.A. decided to invade, we celebrat-

ed (in private). Now Americans humiliate us, treat us with contempt, and kill indiscriminately. My father’s death was no accident. He was very vocal in opposing America. What other option do we have, except the Taliban? They are, at least, from among us: Afghans. Once again, our hope is to be rescued from the Americans by the Taliban.” Even after reassurances that his name would not be disclosed, from his fellow Afghans who introduced me, he could not help whispering!

Unlike Mohsin, many farmers from (and I name here the one non-Pashtun province) Herat, the Darri-speaking region, did not hesitate to say out loud and very clearly, in 2009, “we used to manage a respectable living by growing poppy. Then government troops came to burn our crops two years ago, promising compensation. When we did not receive compensation and barely survived the winter, we went to Kabul; the Tajik butchers (Hanif Atmar, minister for interior and Qaseem Fahim, defense minister) abused us and turned us away with threats. We have no option but to seek help from neighboring Taliban (to again

grow poppy). They charge us 10 per cent but not only do they take it to Pakistan: they also provide us protection when the government troops try coming here.”

Almost every international journalist recognizes that the problem in Afghanistan is the thoroughly corrupt Karzai government, propped up by the U.S.A.; which act, in itself, is sufficient to alienate the Afghans from both Karzai and the U.S.A., but which, coupled with U.S. indifference, humiliation, and indiscriminate killing of the local population, is a lethal combination which is bound to assist the resurgence of the Taliban. For reasons best known to the administration, the U.S.A. alone seems unaware of this fact.

I forget who it was who said, “Dreams guide the course of the future.” So, dream on, Mr. Blackwill, but it is very highly unlikely that your dream will ever reach fruition!

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