

# Developments in the Arab region and the impact of international

Between populist trends and alternative voices

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## Contents

<b>Notes on contributors .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The Arab region between domestic changes and the international context .</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>On the 100th anniversary of Sykes–Picot Agreement and Balfour Declaration.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>The potential rise of a populist trend in the Arab region .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>The post-2011 rise of the Arab right-wing .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>The Emergence of the ‘New Right’ in Europe and its views on the main Arab issues .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Global anti-right movements: The quest for Arab resistance.....</b>	<b>46</b>

## Notes on contributors

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## The Arab region between domestic changes and the international context

Arab Forum for Alternatives<sup>1</sup>

The Arab uprisings gave rise to questions about the limitations and abilities of the political system in the region and to speculations about current and future balances of power. The current balance of power arguably tips in favor of the so-called “Gulf camp” led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE. True, Saudi Arabia had a comprehensive vision for the region before the uprisings, one that many argued was only part of the long lasting struggle for the leadership of the region between the progressive camp that promotes modernization and the reactionary camp that uses religion as a political façade. This paper shows how Egypt’s leading role in the progressive camp was transformed into that of a sheer member of the Sunni block, also referred to as the Gulf camp.

The progressive and reactionary camps, led by Egypt and Saudi Arabia respectively, revolved around leadership of the region and each of the two countries served the interests of one of the then two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. However, Egypt and Saudi Arabia shared one thing in common, the Palestinian cause that constituted the main source of political legitimacy for both of them. The changes that took place in Libya and Syria after uprisings developed into civil wars gave the Gulf camp more power to lead the region<sup>2</sup>. Those changes gave Gulf countries the opportunity to undermine the Arab Spring regardless of the impact on the people of the countries in which the uprisings took place.

Some see that political regimes in the Arab region are on the verge of collapsing, especially that countries in the region are no longer united over the Palestinian cause and no longer regard Israel as the common enemy. While political alliances in the region usually shifted based on mutual interests<sup>3</sup>, speculations are now rife about the imminent collapse of the regional order<sup>4</sup>.

The countries where Arab uprisings led to the toppling of the regime or forced incumbent regimes to adopt a series of reforms focused more on domestic issues. Meanwhile, Gulf monarchies made sure that the revolution is not exported to their territories and worked hard to prove that the uprisings were a mistake and that political and economic reforms from within

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<sup>1</sup> Special thanks to researcher Mohamed Ramadan for the translation and the additions he made to this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Mohamed El Agati. “A new regional order or a global disaster in the making [Arabic].” *As-Safir Al-Arabi*, October 14, 2018: <http://assafir.com/Article/514088/Archive>.

<sup>3</sup> Gamil Matar. “The Arab regional order collapses [Arabic].” *Al-Hayat*, December 2016: <https://goo.gl/DVkf5u>.

<sup>4</sup> Abdel Moneim al-Mashat. “The end of the Arab regional order [Arabic].” *Al-Shorouk*, August 23, 2016: <https://goo.gl/Neze33>

are the ideal way of effecting a real change. This discourse contributed to turning revolutions into civil wars in several countries in the region such as Syria, Libya, and Yemen.

For Gulf monarchies, the actual success of revolutions meant granting citizens more political rights that entail taking part in governance through parliamentary and municipal elections. In North African countries such as Egypt and Algeria, this meant more separation of powers, which is the case now in Tunisia, so that no institution or group would monopolize power. On the other hand, countries in which a civil war erupted such as Syria, Libya, and Yemen, radical changes had to be introduced so that all local communities can be granted more freedom and minorities would be protected<sup>5</sup>.

In addition, the post-revolutionary era witnessed the emergence of new alliances in which non-Arab powers, such as Turkey, Iran, and Israel, played a major role. These alliances were interested in stopping any other potential uprisings and preserving the current regional order. The alliances were associated with the vision of the Gulf region that replaced Israel with Iran as the archenemy and divided the region along sectarian lines hence replacing the Arab nationalistic discourse with the Sunni camp.

The new order is accompanied by a number of developments, which can be summarized as follows:

- The Palestinian cause came back to the forefront as political activists expressed their solidarity with Gaza against Israeli strikes and opposed the normalization discourse used by the current order to curry favor with Western powers.
- A new generation that utilized modern technologies in the revolution emerged. This started with the role the internet played in the protests that took place in Bahrain then continued with the 2011 revolution, in which social networks played a major role in toppling/ resisting incumbent political regimes. Some of those youths used conventional media for political activism such as cafes, which was the case in Syria, in addition to literary works written across the region as a critique of the political scene<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Perry Cammack and Marwan Muasher. "Arab Fractures: Citizens, State and Social Contracts." Carnegie Endowment for international peace, 2017: <https://bit.ly/2kV8efW>.

<sup>6</sup> Mohamed El Agati and Omar Samir. "The participation of Arab youths between national concerns and regional ambitions" in *Youths in the Arab Region and Unconventional Participation: From Virtual World to Revolution*, pp. 237-75. Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, June 2016: <https://bit.ly/2taMeQ1>



- Emphasis was laid on issues that were previously overlooked such as citizenship principles and minority rights. Initiatives promoting those issues were always faced with repression by regimes that only focused on the Sunni-Shiite conflict.
- Gulf countries acquired more power that enabled them to intervene in other countries' political affairs. This intervention played a major role in undermining the revolutionary movements that took place across the region and that prioritized freedom, social justice, and citizenship.
- The impact of neo-liberal policies increased forcefully, which was demonstrated in the cases of Egypt and Tunisia in which economic reforms were enforced by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank without taking into consideration their effect on the living standards of average citizens.

The developments that took place in the Arab region cannot be seen in isolation from the global context, particularly the coming to power of Donald Trump and Brexit among many changes that led analysts and commentators to predict the rise of the far right across the world. This materialized with the coming to power of right-wing parties in different European countries such as Poland, Hungary, and Italy in addition to electoral victories scored by those parties in the Netherlands, Sweden, and France<sup>7</sup>.

It is noteworthy that right-wing parties are not the same even though they share common characteristics such as the populist and exclusionist discourse that is demonstrated in slogans such as “Hungary first” adopted by the Hungarian Freedom Party and “Make America great again” adopted by Donald Trump<sup>8</sup>. This phenomenon was analyzed by many commentators both inside and outside the United States. For example, Christian Caryl wrote an article entitled “We’ve Got to Face It: Trump Is Riding a Global Trend” in *Foreign Policy*, in which he argued that the far-right is not only rising in the United States and Europe, but also in different parts of the world. He cited the example of Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi in Egypt, and Erdogan in Turkey. Caryl also saw that the results of the Brexit referendum demonstrate the rising strength of the far right<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Matt McAlester. “Brexit, Trump, Le Pen and the Rise of the Right: The Anger Goes Global.” *The Independent*, November 2016: <https://goo.gl/TRGwNe>

<sup>8</sup> Josh Lowe. “The New Nationalism: Battle Lines Are Drawn.” *The Independent*, November 2016: <https://goo.gl/TRGwNe>

<sup>9</sup> “America First but Who Will Be Second.” *BBC News*, February 9, 2017: <https://goo.gl/fHD29D>

Several factors contributed to the rise of the ultra-nationalist far right, including economic conditions and the impact of globalization on the national and the global levels in both the north and the south. Added to this is the failure of conventional political elites in offering solutions to different crises, especially on the economic level with the widening gap between classes as incomes dropped, austerity measures increased poverty, and the state's role in the economy receded. The decline of Keynesian economics, which were prevalent in the United States and Europe after World War Two, led to growing disparities and subsequent indignation on the part of the working and middle classes in those countries<sup>10</sup>. The 2008 financial crisis increased the suffering of those classes as large numbers of workers were laid off and with industries shifting from the centers to the peripheries in China and East Europe. The anti-globalization discourse, traditionally adopted by the left, was adopted by the right and was accompanied by a rejection of everything that is not associated with conventional institutions or, as the European right-wing puts it, that is not elected in Brussels. This does not mean that the far right has an economic alternative that can replace globalization, but it rather goes back to globalization in its earlier form where capitalist centers were more in control with periphery countries depending on their products without the actual transfer of industries to the periphery. That is why the right-wing focuses on national industries more than tackling the structural defects of the economy, which are basically the result of economic inequality.

### **The rise of the far right in the United States and Europe:**

The rise of the far right is directly associated with the 2008 global financial crisis, which increased unemployment rates and was followed by a worldwide depression. This crisis played a major role in lending credibility to far right parties, which took advantage of the failure of governments and conventional political leaders in dealing with the aftermath of the financial crisis. Several developments on the ground sped up the popularity of far right parties including adoption of austerity measures by governments and the subsequent decline of state services, especially education and healthcare, growing unemployment, and a decline in growth rates in addition to the prioritization of foreign investments. These developments were accompanied by the refugee crisis as a result of the eruption of civil wars in several Arab countries that witnessed popular uprisings. Far right parties managed to take advantage of all those

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<sup>10</sup> “How anti-globalization switched from a left to a right-wing issue – and where it will go next.” The Convention Website, January 2018: <https://bit.ly/2HLIRdR>



developments to slam conventional political institutions and adopt a discourse that appealed to the public<sup>11</sup>.

The growing popularity of far right parties was demonstrated in election results on both European and local levels. In France, the National Front won in 2015 eleven seats in municipal elections and two seats in the French parliament in addition to 25% of the total votes in European Parliament elections, the highest among all French parties. In the UK, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), which supported exiting the European Union, won several seats in municipal elections, won a seat in the House of Commons for the first time in its history, and got more votes than any other British party in the European Parliament elections. The party gained more credibility when the British voted for leaving the European Union. The Swedish Democrats Party won 13% of the votes in parliamentary elections in 2014, thus enabling the party to lobby for the adoption of an anti-immigrant agenda and to obstruct the government on several instances including, to cite one example, budget approval. In Denmark, the Conservative People's Party won several votes in the European Parliament elections<sup>12</sup>.

In Italy, the world's eighth economy, the drop in growth rates is largely contributed to the rise of the far right under the leadership of the Five Star Movement (M5S) that bases its discourse on offering an alternative to conventional political parties. The movement won municipal elections in Rome in 2016 and won 32% of parliament seats in 2018, hence remarkably exceeding all other Italian parties<sup>13</sup>. Italy receives the largest numbers of illegal immigrants from the Southern Mediterranean and the anti-immigrant discourse adopted by M5S played a major role in increasing its popularity.

### **Characteristics of far right parties/ movements:**

Despite the fact that far right parties are not similar, they do share a number of characteristics whether in Europe or the United States. These include adopting a neo-liberal approach, animosity towards social democracy that emerged from the leftist heritage of welfare countries, and rejection of international organizations such as the European Union or free trade zones.

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Foster. "The Rise of the Far-Right in Europe is not a False Alarm." *The Telegraph*, May 2016: <https://goo.gl/PAXAWL>

<sup>12</sup> Abdallah al-Masry. "The European political map in the aftermath of the global financial crisis [Arabic]." *Edaat*, April 17, 2016: <https://bit.ly/2DYOUqt>

<sup>13</sup> Milton Ezarti. "Italy May Be A Bigger Test For The EU Than Brexit Is." *Foreign Policy*, November 2018: <https://bit.ly/2G6FzPi>

Those parties also share an exclusionist discourse that promotes dividing the world into “us” versus “them”<sup>14</sup>. This is particularly demonstrated in the anti-immigrant discourse used by those parties under the pretext that immigrants pose a threat to the culture and identity of host countries and that their presence is always linked to rising unemployment and crime rates. In addition, most of those parties do not prioritize environmental issues.

Islamophobia constitutes an integral part of the exclusionist discourse adopted by far right parties. For example, the National Front in France used Islamophobia as part of its electoral campaign. The same applied to the Hungarian Freedom Party which called Islam Hungary’s and Europe’s, even the world’s, first enemy<sup>15</sup>. This Islamophobic discourse culminated with the travel ban Donald Trump issued against Syrian refugees and against six predominantly Muslim countries for three months<sup>16</sup>.

### **Arab versions of the far right:**

The rise of the far right in the Arab region is linked to the fall of incumbent regimes and the subsequent emergence of terrorist groups that replaced the state as was the case in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen. These developments set the stage for the prioritization of the war on terror over reforms and allowed the state to use national security as a pretext for undermining political parties and civil society organizations. This is clearly demonstrated in the case of Egypt, where terrorism justifies repression.

It is important to note the differences between the American and Egyptian cases. In the United States, even though Donald Trump is not originally a politician, he came to power through conventional political tools that involved the regular competition between the country’s two parties and democratic elections. This is not the case with Egypt where Abdel Fattah al-Sisi came to power at a time when post-revolutionary democratic transition was faced with numerous obstacles including the gradual marginalization of different political factions, especially after the coming to power of the Muslim Brotherhood and the subsequent intervention by the military to topple their regime.

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas Greven. “The Rise of Right-Wing: Populism in Europe and the United States.” May 2016: <https://goo.gl/mMRJyu>

<sup>15</sup> Rabah Zeghouni. “Islamophobia and the rise of the far right in Europe [Arabic].” *Al-Mostaqbal al-Arabi*, issue no. 421, March 2014: <https://bit.ly/2ta4J7u>

<sup>16</sup> Peter Foster. “The Rise of the Far-Right in Europe is not a False Alarm.” *The Telegraph*, May 2016: <https://goo.gl/PAXAWL>

Trump and Sisi, however, share a number of characteristics, on top of which is the fact that they both came from outside the conventional political elite and gained popularity through a discourse that, for many voters, proved the failure of this elite. The fact that Trump is originally a businessman with no political history made him an alternative to conventional political powers that voters no longer trust. The same applied to Sisi who also had no political experience and rose at a time when traditional political factions in Egypt had failed to provide an alternative and to counter the growing influence of the Muslim Brotherhood.

In addition to the prioritization of the war on terror, Arab and Western far right groups share a general hostility to Islamism that leads to absence of distinction between extremist and moderate Islamists. They also share common views on undocumented immigration and economic interests.

### **The impact of far right movements:**

The victories scored by far right movements and parties across the world pose a number of questions about imminent policy changes, especially as far as immigrants are concerned, as well as the future of entities such as the European Union which might collapse under the growing influence of ultra nationalist parties that see international organizations as a threat to national identity<sup>17</sup>.

According to the 2016 Human Rights Watch report, the rise of far right parties has a negative impact on human rights since those parties adopt anti-immigrant discourses and give precedence to the war against terrorism that at many times justifies different violations<sup>18</sup>. This exclusionist discourse is bound to play a major role in shaping new policies on immigrants and refugees especially in countries with growing far right influence such as Italy.

### **Looking for an alternative:**

One of the main factors that contributed to the rise of the far right is the alleged absence of an alternative to conventional political factions. Ultra-nationalist parties provided that alternative through making national security their topmost priority. Those parties also adopted the neoliberal approach, which they promoted as the only way out of economic stagnation despite the obvious failure of austerity measures and the subsequent decline of the role of state in social

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<sup>17</sup> Iman Anan. "The repercussions of the rise of the far right in Europe [Arabic]." El Badil Center for Planning and Strategic Studies, December 19, 2016: <https://bit.ly/2zSQV4M>

<sup>18</sup> Human Rights Watch World Report 2016: <https://www.hrw.org/ar/world-report/2016>

services. While the far right seemed to have offered an alternative to the conventional political elite, this alternative is not sustainable since it is not founded on the principles of social justice and economic rights.

Finding a real alternative necessitates a deeper insight into the mechanisms of alternative economy, including taxes, budget, trade unions, electoral systems... etc. It is also important to look into alternative political approaches that cover crucial issues such as citizenship, immigration, social and economic rights, governance, and transparency. All this is contingent upon the rise of a leftist trend that prioritizes the above-mentioned issues.

### **The rise of anti-right discourse:**

As a reaction to the rising power of far right parties, a leftist or anti-right trend started emerging. This trend is represented by politicians such as Jeremy Corbyn, who became the leader of the Labor Party in Britain in 2015, Bernie Sanders, who lost the Democratic Party's preliminary elections to Hillary Clinton in the US, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who ran in the French presidential elections, and Alexis Tsipras, the former Greek prime minister. There are also several parties that represent this trend in Europe such as Syriza in Greece, led by Tsipras, and Podemos in Spain, led by Pablo Iglesias Turrión<sup>19</sup>. It is noteworthy that despite the economic crisis in Spain, the far right did not get more than 1% of the votes in the past few years as opposed to the left that got more popular<sup>20</sup>.

Many of the movements that emerged as a reaction against the far right were founded in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crises. These include Occupy Wall Street and Occupy London among others. Protests against the far right increased remarkably in the United States and across Europe following Trump's victory<sup>21</sup>. Social networks and TV shows also played a major role in slamming ultra-nationalist movements whether in European countries, such as the Netherlands and Sweden, or Arab countries, such as Morocco.

Several initiatives, mainly by American and European academics, propose new approaches that can deal with the negative impact of the policies adopted by the far right<sup>22</sup>. This was

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<sup>19</sup> Ahmed Diab. "The significance of Corbyn's presidency of the British Labor Party [Arabic]." *Democracy Magazine*, issue no. 60, October 2015: <https://goo.gl/IHR2IZ>

<sup>20</sup> Carmen González-Enríquez. "The Spanish Exception: Unemployment, Inequality and Immigration, but No Right-Wing Populist Parties." *Royal Institute*, Working Paper 3/2017, February 2017: <https://goo.gl/mPJfJX>

<sup>21</sup> Marina Sitrin and Dario Azzellini. *They cannot represent us: Reinventing Democracy from Greece to Occupy*. Verso, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> See Yanis Varoufakis and other Manifesto of the DIEM25 movement: <https://bit.ly/2m6QEU7>.

demonstrated in the suggestions made by French economist Thomas Picketty in several papers and books<sup>23</sup>, in which he attributes the current economic crisis to the rise of the far right across Europe. According to Picketty, the European Union needs to work on bridging the gap in incomes and wealth within each of its members rather than between them. He proposes the establishment of transnational political entities whose powers exceed those of local governments and which can assume many of the responsibilities currently handled by respective states. For this to be possible, however, the scope of European Parliament elections needs to be extended beyond just choosing representatives for each member state. Picketty proposes the establishment of a European association in which all members of the European Union are represented, but that has more powers than the European Parliament. These powers would include drafting and approving a common budget. In the same vein, Picketty supports giving the European Central Bank more powers that enables it of ratifying common economic and financial policies for all member states. In other words, Picketty proposes turning Europe into a federal entity in which, like the United States, each country has the right to tax collection and political representation while major policies are handled by the central association. Picketty's theory about the link between growing inequality and the rise of the far right is quite valid. The Yellow Vests protests in France prove his point.

### **Conclusion:**

The rise of the far right needs to be subject to extensive research that focuses on regional developments and changes in the balance of power in the Arab world and how far the coming to power of ultranationalist parties in several countries in the West affected these countries' policies in the Arab region. It is also important to look into the impact of the far right in the West on the Arab region, especially in countries that witnessed popular uprisings in the past ten years. Added to this is the necessity of looking into the changes in the political structure of the Arab region in order to make democratic transition possible and how this transition will be dealt with on the part of extreme right parties. The refugee crisis and immigration are also among the most pressing issues when dealing with the impact of the rise of the far right in both the West and the Arab region.

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas Picketty. "Our manifesto to save Europe from itself." *The Guardian*, December 2018: <https://bit.ly/2rs5PdR>

## On the 100th anniversary of Sykes–Picot Agreement and Balfour Declaration

**Fawwaz Traboulsi**

In late 2019, my book *Sykes-Picot/ Balfour: Beyond Maps* was released. I wrote the book at the centennial of the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration, which also coincided with the establishment of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria as the new caliphate. Sykes-Picot Agreement was seen by many as the initial reason for the state of chaos the region plunged into and the rise of ISIS was in itself seen as the end of the agreement. Speculations were also rife about the new regional order.

The Sykes-Picot Agreement, together with Henry McMahon's declaration and the Balfour Declaration, not only divided the Arab region at the time, but have also been the main driving force behind all divisions that followed. In addition, the agreement became the main reference to a number of theories and sweeping statements that lacked accuracy and was later used by different regimes to attribute domestic failure to external powers, hence absolving themselves of any responsibility. One of the main consequences of the agreement is the fact that it became a given and the map that resulted from it was seen for decades as a solid structure that cannot be changed. This was particularly demonstrated in the way the agreement gradually became part of the dominant culture in the region and a main geopolitical reference based on which different developments are wrongly interpreted. The Balfour Declaration, on the other hand, was not only a document that allowed the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, but also developed into a US-Israeli project that aimed at dividing the region along sectarian and ethnic lines as a means of legitimizing the existence of Israel. It is no surprise, therefore, that at the centennial the British government was called upon to apologize for issuing the declaration.

In my book, I tried to look beyond the maps in order to examine a historical moment that lasted for around a decade, one in which the destiny of the Arab world, the Levant in particular, was determined when the powers that emerged victorious in the World War One decided to divide Ottoman states amongst themselves. Britain and France created a new regional order in which they became in full control of water resources, oil, agriculture, and transportation in these states and in which they put sectarian minorities in charge under the pretext of protecting minorities.

The book attempted to answer a number of questions about that moment in history and which remain unanswered: How long did the Sykes-Picot Agreement remain a secret? And from whom was it kept secret? Was the Faisal–Weizmann Agreement, in which Faisal bin Hussein recognized the Balfour Declaration and agreed to separate Palestine from Greater Syria, is authentic or fake? And why is this agreement and its appendix, a letter Faisal bin Hussein wrote to Felix Frankfurter, President of the Zionist Organization of America, are rarely used as a reference to this era? Did the British and the French occupy those territories to divide them or divided them to control them? What are the economic, demographic, political, and strategic criteria based on which the region was divided? Did the British occupy Palestine in 1915-1916 to offer it to the Jews or did they use the Balfour Declaration to legitimize their occupation of Palestine and separate it from historical Syria that France claimed? Is the content of the letter Arthur Balfour wrote to Lord Rothschild, which contained the promise of a Jewish homeland, congruent with the dominant interpretations of the declaration? Why aren't the borders of the Levant in the agreement the same as the current borders? The study ends with tackling a number of issues pertaining to the states that resulted from the division. This includes the unity-division duality and the type of unity the agreement undermined, the natural and/or artificial lines along which each of these states was created, and the reason Arab states resorted to Western powers to gain their rights.

This paper tackles the impact, past and present, of the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration through focusing on three main issues:

- Responsibility, both regional and international, for the division of the Levant
- The use of the Sykes-Picot/Balfour metaphor in the 2011 Arab uprisings
- Western strategies in the region since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century

### **Unity, division, and separation:**

One of the main questions that need to be posed is whether only the West is responsible for the division of the Levant and whether the West has always obstructed any form of unity in the region. To answer this question, it is important to note that opposing or supporting any forms of unification in the Arab world was and is still directly linked to how far the unification or lack of it would serve the economic, political, and strategic interests of the West at a given historical moment.



In 1950, the United States, Britain, and France issued a joint statement, the Tripartite Declaration, in which they identified the borders of the Levant following the creation of the state of Israel and guaranteed that the terms of the Arab-Israeli Armistice agreements are to be implemented. As part of an initiative to end the Arab-Israeli conflict, the three countries announced stopping the provision of arms to the region, a decision that applied to Arab countries but not Israel. They also called upon Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon to join an alliance for the defense of the Mediterranean against Communism and the Soviet Union, but they rejected the proposal and argued that Zionism is more dangerous to the region than Communism. This started a conflict between the three signatories of the statement and independence movements in the Arab region that lasted for at least two decades. This conflict was marked by a number of regional developments including military coups in Syria and Egypt, the Czech arms deal, the Tripartite Aggression against Egypt, the Egyptian-Syrian unity, the creation of the state of Iraq, and the 1967 war.

In this context, the three Western powers opposed the creation of the United Arab Republic that unified Egypt and Syria in 1958 since they saw it as the nucleus of Arab independence movements, hence a threat to their interests and those of their allies, Israel and Saudi Arabia. That is why the three powers, together with Saudi Arabia, welcomed the military coup that led to the separation between Egypt and Syria in 1961. Britain had responded to the creation of the United Arab Republic through uniting the two Hashemite kingdoms of Iraq and Jordan under the Arab Federation that disintegrated shortly after with the creation of the Iraqi republic.

Western powers did not, however, play a major role in the disintegration of the union between Nasser's Egypt and the Baath regimes in Iraq and Syria, which lasted from 1963 till 1964. This union collapsed when Baathists in Iraq and Syria tried to dominate Egypt under the pretext of avoiding the mistakes of the Egyptian-Syrian union. The union was replaced with the Baath state project that soon collapsed too when the Baath Party was toppled in Iraq in 1964.

Talks about a unification between Syria and Iraq came back to the forefront when late Egyptian president Anwar Sadat visited Israel in 1979. Then Iraqi president Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr and his Syrian counterpart Hafez al-Assad exchanged visits and attempted to unify both countries, yet the relationship between the two countries soured remarkably as then vice-president Saddam Hussein accused his opponents in the Iraqi government of plotting with the Assad regime to get rid of him. Borders between the two countries were closed and the Baath Party split in two national entities, each involved in several attempts at deposing the other.

Upon withdrawing from its protectorates in the Gulf region in 1971, Britain encouraged the union of nine emirates. The United Arab Emirates was created, but both Qatar and Bahrain declined joining the union. This union was formed under the auspices of Western powers and was supported by Nasser's Egypt.

The following year a union was formed between Egypt, Sudan, Libya, but Western powers did not oppose it, especially that Egypt and Libya fought the communist coup that briefly removed Sudanese President Jaafar Nimeiry from power and supported the bloody coup that reinstated him. Shortly after, the union collapsed. Libyan president Muammar Gaddafi continued with a series of unification attempts, all of which failed.

The only contemporary unification that materialized in the Arab world was that of Yemen in 1990 and which was supported by the US as well as the Baath Party in Iraq. Ali Abdullah Saleh visited the US and got the blessings of President George Bush, who saw the unification as the means through which the communist regime in the south could be undermined. When, in 1994, war erupted between the two parties and southern leaders attempted to regain control of their former territories, the American Administration under Bill Clinton kept supporting the unification. The US did not support the Saudi plan to keep Yemen divided, which explains why Saudi Arabia did not lobby, as it promised southern leaders, for issuing a decree from the Arab League to send joint forces to Yemen to help the south maintain its sovereignty within its previous borders.

One of the most prominent examples of division in the Arab region is that which resulted from the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. The main aim of division in this case was controlling Iraq's oil. Some might argue that an invading power does not need to divide a country if it can control its resources anyway. While such argument is valid in many cases, it is not applicable to the case of Iraq since after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, dividing the country enabled the US to allocate long-term oil contracts to different companies based on the region in which they will operate. Iraq was, therefore, divided into American, British, French, Italian, Russian, and Chinese franchises. The US also fully controlled all short-term oil and security contracts across the country. Another argument is that this division could pave the way for federalism, which allegedly proved successful in Kurdistan. However, what was implemented in Iraq is a sectarian and not a federal system, which was demonstrated in the alliances formed between Kurds and Shiites against Sunnis. When an independence referendum was held in Kurdistan in 2017 and the majority of votes came in favor of independence, a military conflict ensued

between the region and the central government with the latter wanting to control the Kirkuk oil fields and considering the results of the referendum illegal. The US and Western powers did not support the referendum and cooperated with the central government to undermine any Kurdish independence initiative so that the region can remain under its control.

The secession of South Sudan is the most recent example of divisions in the Arab region. The US supported this secession with the help of then Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir who insisted on applying Islamic laws on the Christian half of the population. Bashir rejected federalism and insisted on a referendum on either total unification or secession.

### **Arab revolutions and Sykes-Picot:**

The late Egyptian veteran journalist Mohamed Hassanein Heikal said in an interview with al-Ahram Newspaper on May 25, 2015 that Arab revolutions were only a new Sykes-Picot, another project to divide the region and its resources. According to him, several projects, a euphemism he always used to refer to conspiracies, were meant to be implemented in the region in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

The first is a US-European project that aims at igniting a Sunni-Shiite conflict, which was demonstrated in supporting the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and attempts at reviving Bernard Lewis's proposal to replace the Arab-Israeli conflict in the region with an Arab-Persian one. The division of Iraqi oil, Heikal argues, signaled the beginning of such project. The second is a Turkish/Ottoman project that started with intervention in Syria. Heikal notes that Turkey was the victim of Sykes-Picot and is seeking to regain the power it lost and to play a vital role in reshaping the region. Heikal believes, however, that the Ottoman project is not capable of replacing the Arab nationalist project and fill the vacuum. The third is an Iranian project that is still limited owing to cultural differences and geopolitical considerations in addition, of course, to the fact that Iran itself is suffering from the impact of sanctions. That is why Iran's main strategy at the moment is that of defense. A fourth project, which Heikal calls half a project, is that planned by Israel and aims at undermining the Palestinian cause.

Heikal sees in the Arab Spring another Sykes-Picot that extends its impact to Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya and he only includes Syria among the countries affected by the original agreement. It is worth noting that neither Turkey nor Iran managed to implement their projects. Erdogan's Ottoman project collapsed as a result of numerous regional and domestic complications while Iran's influence was undoubtedly shaken by the losses incurred by its major allies across the

region whether Hezbollah in Lebanon, Shiite militias in Syria, the Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq, and the Houthis in Yemen.

It is worth noting that all those projects are initiated by external powers, which can be applicable to the support the US gave to the Muslim Brotherhood. However, it is not possible to attribute the Sunni-Shiite conflict in Iraq only to Saudi Arabia and Iran, both of which undoubtedly played crucial roles in igniting and supporting the conflict, while totally overlooking the role of local factions and governments that agreed to be part of this division. It is also important to pose the question of whether Saudi Arabia can be absolved from undermining the Palestinian cause through replacing the Arab-Israeli conflict with an Arab-Persian one. Another question is how Heikal, had he been alive, would have explained the continuation of Arab uprisings in Sudan and Algeria.

### **The war against terrorism:**

Since the September 11 bombings in 2001, the US has had a clear strategy in the Arab world, one that prioritizes the war against terrorism without taking into consideration developments that take place in different countries across the region. This strategy included US support for authoritarian regimes while at the same time calling for democratic reforms and defending human rights. This was demonstrated in the case of Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen under the pretext that he was fighting al-Qaeda even though Saleh brought hundreds of Arab Afghans into Yemen and used them to assassinate his opponents and in the war against the south. He also received arms and funding from the US in return for allowing American Special Forces to be stationed in Yemen and hunt down members of jihadist groups. Bashar al-Assad used the war against terrorism in his favor when he crushed the Syrian revolution and accused all Syrians who call for democracy and reform of terrorism. He also used to receive al-Qaeda detainees so that his security institutions can extract information from them on behalf of the United States and used to provide the US with intelligence on Arab jihadists.

The war against terrorism determined the reaction of the American Administration to Arab uprisings in the sense that it would support toppling a president when he is no longer of use while making sure he is replaced by the vice-president or any member of the same regime to make sure no drastic changes are introduced and no threats are posed against Israel. The decision to support “moderate Islamism” was part of this plan. While Islamists did score electoral victories, supporting them was not a means of promoting democratic reform, but rather part of the war against terrorism. According to the US administration, having moderate

Islamism come to power is a way to fight radical and militant Islamism, hence the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Nahda Party in Tunisia, the Islah Party in Yemen, and the government of Abdelilah Benkirane in Morocco. In Syria, Western powers supported the creation of a national council of which the Muslim Brotherhood comprised a major part including factions that used a secular or leftist façade.

The reaction of the United States to the Syrian revolution was marked by a conflict between two plans that were, to a great extent, opposed to each other. The first was a regime change in Syria, which was expected to be carried out by regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey. This plan was, however, obstructed by the prioritization of the war against terrorism and nuclear disarmament in Iran, the latter directly linked to keeping Israel the only nuclear power in the region. The US was also negotiating with Iran on its nuclear program and that made it difficult for it to topple Iran's main ally in the Arab region, Bashar al-Assad's regime. In addition, Iran did play a part in the war against terrorism through its intervention, whether officially or through militias loyal to it, in the conflict against ISIS, al-Nusra Front, and al-Qaeda. The oscillation between the two plans became obvious in Barack Obama's statements, for while asserting that the Syrian regime has to be toppled, he argued that there is no current alternative for this regime that controls an army of 300,000 much needed by the US in its war against terrorism. It is also possible that the United States did not want to repeat the same mistake it made in Iraq when deciding to disband the Iraqi army.

The Syrian regime, hence, managed to link its repression of opposition to the war against terrorism, which explains why the United States stopped its allies from providing Syrian opposition with anti-aircraft missiles under the pretext that they might fall into terrorists' hands. It is noteworthy that imposing a ban on Syrian Air Forces was the only way to allow a settlement between the regime and the opposition. The US also allowed air and ground intervention by Russia, which tipped the balance in favor of the Syrian regime that had a better opportunity to regain control after Donald Trump announced full withdrawal of US forces from Syria.

Also in Syria, the United States supported the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces, which led an armed alliance that included the fighters of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and different Arab tribal groups. In 2014, the United States funded, trained, and offered logistic support for the Syrian Democratic Forces and even gave air cover to the forces' military operations and sent thousands of American soldiers to fight in their ranks. The US also

protected the forces' control over Syria's northern and eastern borders against Turkey, an area that constitutes almost one third of Syria and is populated by 5-6 million Syrian (Arabs, Turkmen, Kurds, and Assyrians). The Syrian Democratic Forces played a major role in defeating ISIS in northern Syria and military operations against ISIS were announced to have come to an end after the fall of the group's last stronghold in Baghuz. Interestingly, the Syrian Democratic Forces have close ties with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), designated years ago as a terrorist group by the US.

The global war against terrorism is one of the most conspicuous military imperialist strategies the region has witnessed since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This war involved a number of flagrant imperial practices. These include violating the sovereignty of individual countries, forming alliances that only serve the imperial project regardless of their impact on the citizens of those countries, supporting authoritarian regimes and turning a blind eye to exploitation, human rights violations, corruption, and deteriorating living standards in each country.

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## **The potential rise of a populist trend in the Arab region**

### **Wissam Saada**

The left and the right are two problematic terms in the glossary of modern politics since they pose a numbers of questions that have till this moment been a source of heated debate. For example, should political powers, social organizations, or cultural entities define themselves as belonging to the right or the left? Is it possible to categorize an entity as right-wing while its declared allegiance is to the left or vice versa? Could a community or country be solely following one trend and excluding the other? Or can one trend be significantly dominant in a given community or country? Is a balance between right and left required for the establishment of an effective political system?<sup>24</sup>

The left-right duality started in France in the summer of 1789 when royalists sat on the right side and patriots on the left side. In Britain, the division was between Liberals and

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<sup>24</sup> See Raymond Aron, *L'opium des intellectuels*, Hachette Littératures, coll. "Liberté de l'esprit", 2002 (1<sup>re</sup> éd. 1955).

Conservatives. However, there is more to the rise of the left and the right than this simple division. Technically, it is hard to look at right-left divisions before the polarization that resulted from the 1848 revolutions in Europe and the repression to which protestors were subjected in most European countries. The failure of the 1848 uprisings highlighted the emergence of two opposing trends that later on took the shape of political parties. This development culminated with the establishment of socialist and labor parties, also known as Second International parties, in 1889. On July 14, 1889, on the centennial of the French Revolution, those parties were created in Paris<sup>25</sup>. It was then that it was possible to distinguish between right and left in politics, first in France then across Europe. This marked a change in the definition of the left. Before the Second International, leftists were determined based on their stance on the legacy of the Enlightenment, including rationalization and universalism, or their stance on social injustices to which underprivileged classes are subjected. Alexis de Tocqueville, for example, was a leftist in the first sense and opposed the 1848 uprisings. Socialist ideologies in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century were in many cases promoted by conservative, even reactionary, circles that opposed the French Revolution and accused the Bourgeoisie of widening the gap between classes and undermining social security networks supported by clerical and feudal entities. So while Marx and Engels clearly belonged to the legacy of the Enlightenment and supported labor against capital, Joseph Proudhon defended social rights while reviving conservative ideologies that opposed the principles of the Enlightenment. It is no coincidence that in 1911 when revolutionary syndicalist Georges Sorel and monarchist Charles Maurras established a group that included representatives of the far right and the far left, they called it Cercle Proudhon, or the Proudhon Circle<sup>26</sup>.

With the Second International, being leftist meant subscribing to the legacy of the Enlightenment and supporting the socialist program. True, Bismarck was the first to set the foundations of the social state in Germany and provided citizens with a form of social security that was much more advanced than that of France, the country in which the 1789, 1830, 1848, and 1871 revolutions started, yet this does not make him a leftist. The term “Bismarck’s socialism” refers to establishing the first social system in modern history, one in which workers can get higher wages, which, according to Marx, is almost impossible in a capitalist state.

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<sup>25</sup> Donald Sassoun. *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century*. The new press, 1998.

<sup>26</sup> Michel Winock. *La France republicaine*. Robert Laffont, 2017.

The Second International failed in formulating a unified stance in the wake of World War II. This was followed by the eruption of the Russian Revolution and subsequent attempts of copying it in Central and Western Europe, which led to the emergence of a different right-left division: between the Communist movement and democratic socialism on one hand and right, center right, and far right factions on the other hand.

The Arab region did not see the emergence of parties that were inspired by the Second International legacy and Arab countries were not represented in any of the Second International conferences. The Arab region did not know the left in its partisan shape except after the establishment of the Third International (Comintern). At that time, European countries started formulating a common concept of the left with its different types (reformist, revolutionary, social democratic, and communist). In the Arab region, the left during colonial times was solely comprised of communist parties. In the post-independence era, left-leaning parties and factions that promoted Arab nationalism were formed (Nasserism, the Baath Party, the Arab Nationalist Movement). While the newly formed entities adopted leftist ideologies, they suppressed supporters of the old left, the communists. The left in the Arab region, therefore, became equivalent to Arab nationalist regimes that promoted the nationalization of private property and agrarian reform while briefly adopting the principles of the Enlightenment. This was not the case in other post-independence countries such as India where the main national faction, the Indian National Congress, adopted a social democratic approach that relied on parliamentary representation and free elections. In the Arab region, on the other hand, democracy was discarded and replaced by a form of popular democracy in which there was little or no room for competition between the left and the right.

Arab nationalist regimes categorized Islamist factions as right and the same was applied to national liberal elites that were influential in colonial times and were seen as royalists. However, only Christian parties in Lebanon identified themselves as belonging to the right, particularly the Phalanges Party, which was inspired by the Spanish Falange of Franco's Spain. The Phalanges, however, was not always unified for it witnessed a conflict between two factions inside the party in the late 1940s and early 1950s. One faction adopted Marxism while the other adopted Emmanuel Mounier's Personalism. After the Marxist faction left the Phalanges and many of its members joined the Communist Party and later established the Leninist Trend, the party became the closest to the European right in the Arab world. However, in the 1960s, divisions started again between the conservative right-wing faction, represented

by Pierre Gemayel, and a faction that leans towards democratic socialism, represented by Maurice Gemayel.

Despite the fact that right-wing parties are not the same, they do share a hostility toward the left and that is why it is not possible for these parties to claim they are neither right nor left. If this stance on the left is seen as the main distinguishing feature, it is possible to identify a right wing in the Arab region through parties and factions that base their political agenda on an anti-communist discourse. According to this criterion, Islamist parties that adopted a fiery anti-communist discourse during the Cold War can be categorized as right wing even though within the same camp there were divisions between a faction that leaned towards a form of Islamic socialism and another that sought a capitalist market with an Islamist framework.

The gap between progressive discourses and the reality of post-independence regimes in the Arab world kept widening until by the end of the Cold War all leftist principles disappeared from their political discourse. The reference to left-leaning factions as “communist” started receding as the word “leftist” became more popular/acceptable. In the post-Cold War era, the left in the Arab region was engaged in a debate over its priorities that were eventually arranged as follows:

- 1- Fighting American imperialism and Zionist aggression
- 2- Fighting political repression
- 3- Fighting reactionary religious groups
- 4- Focusing on social issues, the working class, and the redistribution of wealth

This arrangement of priorities gave rise to another debate on the possibility of working with right-wing factions that share with the left the struggle against imperialism/Zionism, political repression, and reactionary religious groups and whether even with those common goals the right would still aim at dominating the scene. As a whole, Arab countries started moving gradually towards the right as the majority of political powers and cultural circles adopted right-wing principles, including both Islamists and liberals that eventually came to represent different levels of the right.

The growing hegemony of the right was paralleled with the remarkable decline of the left, which can be attributed to a number of reasons. These do not only include lack of political power on the ground, but also ideological flaws such as not taking the analysis of the class system in the region seriously. Added to this is the problem of not linking socialist thought to its philosophical origins, which was also the case with the Second International that severed ties between socialism and philosophy. This was reversed later on. It is noteworthy that most Marxist figures in the 20<sup>th</sup> century from György Lukács to Louis Althusser and Alain Badiou were basically philosophers.

Apart from the anti-communist discourse, factions, parties, or regimes leaning towards the right in the Arab world do not identify themselves as right-wing. This is not the case with the Indian right, which was influenced by the “conservative revolution” and modern right-wing thought, and the Japanese right, represented by Kitarō Nishida, founder of the Kyoto School of Philosophy, who was influenced by the European right. Right-wing parties in the Arab region, whether liberal or Islamist, rarely cared about acquainting themselves with the European conservative right, but rather focused on recycling anti-communist propaganda that prevailed during the Cold War. Islamists particularly focused on fighting communism not only through the revival of the Islamic state, but also through slamming Marx and communist thinkers as similar to Baron Abraham de Rothschild and Theodor Herzl and considering communism and Zionism two faces of the same coin.

The growing influence of neoliberal ideologies that promote privatization and the liberalization of the economy started gradually affecting the Arab region. This was demonstrated in a number of developments, including the prioritization of the service sector or knowledge economy at the expense of agriculture and industry. This led to the emergence of a new economic right-wing in the Arab region and which was founded on the assumption that socialist policies adopted earlier are the reason for the region’s political, economic, and social problems. This new economic right wing took different shapes: liberal, Islamist, and nationalist in addition to a few attempts at endowing it with a leftist flavor. The main difference between the Arab right-wing during the Cold War and the new economic right-wing is that the first relied on an anti-communist discourse while the second considered the public sector its main enemy. The new right-wing also worked on making state institutions serve its interests and those of its supporters. The problem was that even the way right-wing policies were applied in the Arab region was defective. This is mainly because countries in the region developed a type of right

that aimed to get all the privileges provided by state capitalism to bureaucratic circles that maintain strong relations with private financial powers while at the same time getting the privileges provided by the liberalization of the market, trade, and privatization.

The new economic right-wing started with the adoption of the open-door policy by late Egyptian president Anwar Sadat and developed with the influence of neoliberal policies in the 1980s and 1990s. The Arab right-wing maintained close ties with ruling regimes while at times expressing its concern over the dominance of the military and intelligence in those regimes and at others taking advantage of this dominance to serve its own interests. The emergence of the new economic right-wing in the Arab world was paralleled with increasing popularity of the idea that democracy is not possible without democrats and that for those democrats to exist, a transitional period is necessary. During this period, the interim entity that becomes in charge needs to prepare the people for democracy together with the elites that maintain close ties with this entity. It was at that point that the new Arab right-wing did not only focus on the economic aspect, but also took a cultural form in which Western democracy was thought to be the best solution for the region, yet always noted that reaching this democracy requires a great deal of preparation and a transitional period.

When the 2011 uprisings erupted, they targeted not only incumbent regimes, but also the new right-wing with both its economic and cultural aspects. For revolutionaries, the economic aspect undermines the public sector and holds socialism accountable for economic problems in the region while overlooking the most vital sectors such as agriculture and industry. The cultural aspect, on the other hand, does promote democracy yet argues that it should be introduced by the elite and under the supervision of incumbent regimes. Arab revolutions rejected both, yet were unable to produce viable alternatives. This could mainly be attributed to the fact that a large segment of the political elite that led or played a major role in the revolutions were not entirely against the theories proposed by the new right-wing and the factions that were entirely against them did not have enough leverage to make a real change on the ground.

Both Islamists and liberals took part in the Arab revolutions. They agreed at times and disagreed at others as far as reform is concerned. Divisions between the two camps intensified quite soon with Islamists believing that their legitimacy is based on their plan to apply Islamic laws and that democracy, the ballot box in particular, is the means through which they can reach this end. Even liberals were divided in two factions. The first saw that the battle against

repression needs to continue even after the toppling of regimes in 2011 in order to achieve real democracy while the second argued that the people who started the uprisings were not ready for democratic transition and that is why they fell prey to Islamist factions. For the second faction, military rule was seen as progressive when compared to Islamist rule.

In addition to the economic and cultural aspects, a third aspect was added to the new Arab right-wing in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings. This aspect mainly focused on blaming the people for their uprisings. This view was adopted by both right-wing factions that were loyal to toppled regimes as well as right-wing regimes that came to power in the post-revolutionary era. The case of the Muslim Brotherhood was quite peculiar since they did not blame Egyptians when they rebelled against Mubarak but did blame them when they rebelled against Mohamed Morsi. The group also equates between the popular uprising against Morsi and the military coup that followed and regard the two as part of one single plan.

Therefore the Arab right-wing ended up with three main characteristics:

- 1- Holding socialism accountable for the social and economic problems in the region
- 2- Promoting the idea that democratic transition should be done by liberal elites under the supervision of incumbent regimes
- 3- Blaming the people for rising in 2011 and arguing that they should pay the price for their impulsiveness

While the Arab right-wing is quite different, it was still influenced by the rise of the far right in Western countries. This was particularly the case with the discourse that gave precedence to the relationship between right-wing leaders and their supporters over the constitution. In fact, the constitution was sometimes seen as an obstacle. Europe witnessed a rise in the populist right, which subscribes to that theory about the constitution, yet this is still balanced by the constitutional right, which sees the constitution as the basic reference. This is not the case with the Arab right-wing, which is solely populist and at times even opposed to the constitution as a principle. This was mainly demonstrated by the Muslim Brotherhood who saw the Quran as the only constitution and the only text to be used as a reference. Many liberals also opposed revolutionary constitutions and argued that they can only be temporary while others saw constitutions as a remnant of colonialism. Anti-constitutionalism, therefore, became a distinguishing feature of the new Arab right-wing, which does not subscribe to Montesquieu's



theory that “power ought to serve as a check to power.” It is noteworthy that the left in the Arab world did not prioritize the constitution either.

Tunisia, however, proved to be quite different from the rest of the Arab world. A legacy of constitutionalism, even when the constitution was not given precedence in many cases, paved the way for the role played by the Constituent Assembly after the revolution and for the drafting of a constitution that really serves as a social contract. The anti-constitutionalist ideology adopted by the right was expected to reshape the left in the sense that the latter would make constitutionalism its first and foremost priority and look into ways of promoting this ideology across the Arab region, yet this did not happen. Constitutionalism remains marginal for the left in the Arab world until the present moment<sup>27</sup>.

The distinction between the left and the right in the Arab world remains, however, problematic for a number of reasons. These include the absence of a legacy of social democracy in the region, the link established between left-wing parties in the post-independence era and communist parties in colonial times, and the violation of left-wing principles by post-independence regimes that identified themselves as leftist or socialist. It is noteworthy that despite lack of a clear definition, Arab regimes were categorized in the Nasserist era as either right-wing or left-wing<sup>28</sup>. While the right-wing gained more ground in the post-Cold War era and in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings, it still does not identify itself as such and does not identify the left as its main rival.

While it is technically difficult to divide Arab regimes into right-wing and left-wing, it can be argued that the Arab region in general has been leaning towards the right since the 1967 defeat. Leaning towards the right in the Arab world kept growing from one decade to another and took different shapes until blaming the people for revolutions became its most distinguishing feature. This feature undermined any theories about democratic transition or reform from within and which prevailed in Egypt at the time of Mubarak through the National Democratic Party or in Tunisia at the time of Ben Ali through the Democratic Constitutional Rally. This was replaced by a plan to teach the people never to think of rising again. In fact, any future uprisings have to be preceded by a deep understanding of the current political scene that is

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<sup>27</sup> Wessam Saada. “The Arab Spring and Arab thought: Confounded tyranny and the lost critical moment [Arabic].” *Kalamon Review*, issue 2, winter 2012.

<sup>28</sup> Wessam Saada. “The struggle for progress: On the meaning of the Left and scientific awareness [Arabic].” *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, January 20, 2019.

dominated by the right-wing because otherwise they will be thwarted again. It is also necessary to look at examples in the region in which revolutions were not doomed to failure such as Tunisia in the past and Algeria and Sudan in the present moment. This would counter the right's promotion of a pessimistic discourse that only focuses on examples like Syria and Egypt<sup>29</sup>. The right-wing uses these examples to label the demands of the people as illusory and naïve and to legitimize the violation of human rights. This can only be countered through approaching those demands analytically and critically as well as through dealing with the left as based on both the social classes that can effect a change on the ground and the legacy and history of leftist movements and ideologies that would inform any action taken by those classes.

## **The post-2011 rise of the Arab right-wing**

**Georges Fahmi**

In the past few years, the Arab region witnessed a remarkable rise in right-wing rhetoric in both democratic and authoritarian contexts, which was the case in Egypt, Tunisia, Lebanon, and Iraq. True, the 2011 revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia called for freedom, social justice, full implementation of citizenship principles, and political reform and the 2015 uprisings in Iraq and Lebanon called for the elimination of sectarianism, but the aftermath of protests that started off with leftist demands was the growing influence of the right-wing. This applied to organizational right-wing, which was the case with the rise of populist parties in the Iraqi and Lebanese parliamentary elections, and to right-wing rhetoric, which is used by ruling classes in both Egypt and Tunisia. It is necessary to examine the motives of people who changed their priorities from democracy and social justice to adopting a right-wing discourse that prioritizes

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<sup>29</sup> Wessam Saada. "Military rule as thwarted social mobility [Arabic]." *Al-Quds al-Arabi*. April 14, 2019.

security and promotes exclusion. This discourse gives precedence to the preservation of state institutions at the expense of political freedoms and social and economic rights, justifies the violation of human rights under the pretext of fighting terrorism, and portrays opposing politicians as corrupt.

This paper focuses on a main question: How did the right manage to manipulate revolutionary demands for freedom and social justice in order to serve its interests? Answering this question requires taking into consideration three major factors: first, the weakness of state institutions in the Arab region; second, the choices made by political players, particularly leftists, during the transitional period; and third, the establishment of an Islamic state in Iraq and Syria in 2014. Added to this is the powerful rise of the populist right in different parts of the world including the UK, Turkey, Russia, and Italy.

### **First: State Institutions:**

Political scientists define the state as a set of legal, administrative, and bureaucratic structures that aim at regulating the relationship between civil society and the authorities as well as between members of civil society<sup>30</sup>. On the other hand, a political regime is made up of the rules that govern relations inside the ruling circles as well as between the authorities and average citizens. A regime can be presidential, parliamentary, or mixed. The same state can replace one regime with another. Inside each regime, a group occupies a number of official positions related to the decision-making process. The state is a much more stable entity than a regime and a regime is more stable than governments and ruling elites.

In the Arab region, there has hardly been any distinction between the state and the regime. This is mainly attributed to the fact that nation states in the region were established either by ruling elites or colonial powers. The word “state” in Arabic is used as an equivalent to the regime and not state institutions as is the case in Western countries. Nazih Ayubi notes that the word “state” in its Western sense does not have the same meaning as its Arabic equivalent “dawla,” for the first implies “stability and continuity” while the second implies “circulation and reversals of power,” hence two opposite meanings<sup>31</sup>. For example, history books refer to the Umayyad State and the Abbasid State, which are not linked in any way to state institutions. This is also the case in dictionaries. For example, in the 1927 edition of al-Munjid lexicon, a state is defined

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<sup>30</sup> Alfred Stepan. *The State and Society: Peru in Comparative Perspective*. Princeton University Press, 1978.

<sup>31</sup> Nazih N. Ayubi. *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East*. London: I. B. Tauris, 1995.

as “the king and his ministers.” Ayub distinguishes between “strong” and “fierce” states and notes that while Arab countries with their authoritarian regimes and powerful intelligence agencies and national security apparatuses would seem strong, they are in fact fierce. According to Ayubi, fierce states are actually very weak from within since they are unable to control society through soft power and are not popular among the majority. Therefore, the state need to resort to harsh measures to implement its policies. This fierceness was clearly manifested in the reaction of Arab states to the uprisings that took place in 2011. It is noteworthy that in those uprisings, the people did not call for the dismantling of state institutions even though they were weak and incapable of performing their duties, but focused on toppling political regimes.

Reactions to the 2011 revolutions, however, differed from one country to another. While the regimes of Mubarak in Egypt and Ben Ali in Tunisia were toppled peacefully after security institutions abandoned them, a civil war erupted in Yemen, Syria, and Libya. The uprisings did not have the exact same demands, yet they all shared one common impact: forcefully shaking state institutions as a result of the blow they dealt to security entities. However, the decline in the role played by state institutions dates back to long before the eruption of the 2011 revolutions. According to Galal Amin, this decline is basically attributed to the 1967 defeat<sup>32</sup>. In all cases, the decline of the role of state institutions in Tunisia and Egypt and the collapse of these institutions in Syria, Yemen, and Libya contributed to the rise of the populist right that made the protection of state institutions and the prevention of chaos at the center of its discourse.

### **Second: The crisis of the left in the post-revolutionary era:<sup>33</sup>**

The 2011 uprisings exposed the weakness of state institutions in the Arab region, which paved the way for the acceptance of any discourse that focuses on stability and security. However, this was not the only reason. The performance of political factions, particularly the left, in the post-revolutionary era also set the stage for the rise of the populist right. Ironically, some leftist parties supported the rise of the right, which was the case with the Socialist Popular Alliance party in Egypt in 2013.

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<sup>32</sup> Galal Amin. *Egypt and Egyptians in the Mubarak Era* [Arabic]. Cairo: Merit, 2011.

<sup>33</sup> For more about the reaction of the Left to the Arab Spring see *The Left and Arab Revolutions*, Arab Forum for Alternatives: <http://www.afalebanon.org/ar/publication/5614/>

The 2011 uprisings took leftist parties in the Arab world by surprise, which explains why they were absent from initial calls for taking to the streets. In Tunisia, it was mainly youths who led the protests to call for their social and political rights following the suicide of Bouazizi while in Egypt calls for protests started in the Facebook page “We’re all Khaled Saeid” then different political factions, such as the April 6 Youth Movement, the National Association for Change, and Youths for Justice and Freedom, started responding. The same applied in Syria and Yemen, where youths led the calls for protests. Despite the fact that a large segment of the youths that called for protests were members of leftist parties, they opted for taking part in the uprisings as individuals so that their partisan affiliations would not obstruct their work with other youth movements.

Leftist parties, on the other hand, did not have a unified stance on the revolution. In Egypt, the National Progressive Unionist Party proposed holding negotiations with the Mubarak regime following the withdrawal of police forces on January 28, 2011, which was rejected by the majority of protestors in Tahrir Square. In Yemen, the Coalition of Joint Meeting Parties accepted the initiative of Gulf countries while the Yemeni Social Party rejected it. In Tunisia, leftist parties were divided following Ben Ali’s departure on January 14, 2011, for some of them rushed to joining the ranks of power for fear the state would collapse, such as the Progressive Democratic Party, while others saw Ben Ali’s departure as an excellent opportunity for changing the entire political scene in the country, such as Hama Hammami and the late Chokri Belaid.

In countries where regimes were toppled, the revolutionary path started facing a number of obstacles whether through figures from the old regime that attempted to go back to power under the pretext of protecting national security and preventing chaos or Islamists who tried to introduce a new authoritarian regime. The left was trapped in the middle of this polarization and leftist parties did not manage to change their organization structures that had for decades isolated them from average citizens. Hopes for creating a stronger left across the Arab region, which grew remarkably following the uprisings, were gradually crushed. This was demonstrated in Egypt in the case of the Socialist Popular Alliance, which serves as an example for the status of the left in the Arab world in general. The party was made up of independent leftists and former members of old leftist parties who joined forces during the revolution. The party was made up of four main groups: the National Progressive Unionist Party, the Revolutionary Socialists, the Socialist Renewal Movement (an offshoot of the Revolutionary Socialists), and the Democratic Left in addition to independent leftist youths. When the party

was established, supporters of the National Progressive Unionist Party got a majority of votes in internal elections as a result of its previous organizational experience. Other groups were unable to take part in the decision making process, which made them feel that nothing had changed and drove many of them to submit their resignations. This proved that the leftist groups failed in introducing structural reforms that would enable them to handle the transitional period and later be part of the political scene. This failure contributed to the support garnered by populist and right-wing factions.

Iraq and Lebanon witnessed a massive wave of uprisings in the summer of 2015, also called “the summer of social movements”<sup>34</sup>. Those uprisings erupted in response to decline in public services, particularly the garbage crisis in Lebanon and power and water cuts in Iraq, yet shortly after linked this decline to political corruption and the sectarian system. The protests succeeded in creating a cross-sectarian movement that called for change, yet conventional sectarian parties obstructed this change and took advantage of the protests to serve their political interests. This was demonstrated in the legislative elections that followed the protests and that witnessed the rise of populist trends in Iraq exemplified by Moqatada al-Sadr and the right-wing in Lebanon exemplified by Samir Gagaa. In Iraq, the Marching towards Reform alliance, which was led by the Sadrist Current and included the Communist Party and several other parties, came first in the Iraqi elections. In Lebanon, the Lebanese Forces doubled the number of seats they won in the parliament from eight to sixteen and despite the fact that a large number of independents ran in those elections, only one won. The rise of the populist trend is, therefore, linked to the disappointment people felt as other factions failed to provide a viable alternative and to a general disillusionment with the political process. This was also demonstrated in the low turnout in the elections that followed the uprisings: from 60% to 44.5% in Iraq and from 54% to 49.2% in Lebanon<sup>35</sup>.

### **Third: Regional and global developments:**

Hopes for a peaceful political change across the Arab region rose remarkably following the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, but the violent turn revolutions in Syria, Libya, and Yemen took changed those expectations and also provided a fertile soil for the rise of extremist groups

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<sup>34</sup> Maha Yehia. “The summer of national movements: Factions and citizens in Lebanon and Iraq [Arabic].” Cernegie Middle East Center, June 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Lina Khatib and Renad Mansour. “An emerging populism is sweeping the Middle East.” *The Washington Post*, July 11, 2018: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/07/11/what-populist-success-in-iraq-and-lebanon-says-about-todays-middle-east/?utm\\_term=.15e2295dd27a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/07/11/what-populist-success-in-iraq-and-lebanon-says-about-todays-middle-east/?utm_term=.15e2295dd27a)

such as Ansar al-Sharia in Libya and al-Nusra Front in Syria. This culminated with the creation in the summer of 2014 of the Islamic State that extended from Mosul in Iraq to al-Raqqah in Syria. The violations committed by ISIS, including murder, enslavement, and the destruction of historic landmarks sent shock waves across the Arab region. The offshoots ISIS managed to establish in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen as well as Tunisia for a short interval spread fear in all Arab countries and gradually drove people to prioritize security over political reform. The expansion of ISIS, which was partially the result of an already fragile state, was coupled by the failure of political factions that called for reform in offering an alternative that strikes a balance between the protection of state institutions, maintaining security, and fighting terrorism on one hand and providing political, social, and economic freedoms called upon by the uprisings on the other hand. This led to the emergence of a rhetoric that called for a “strongman” who will be able to protect the state and eliminate terrorism regardless of the policies he would adopt in order to make this possible. Right-wing and populist groups took advantage of that sentiment and started promoting the prioritization of security and the war against terrorism as an integral part of its discourse.

In addition, the victory of the right-wing in several countries—Donald Trump in the US, the Northern League in Italy, and the National Front in France, and the rising power of already existing leaders such as Erdogan in Turkey and Putin in Russia—are all factors that led to a general acceptance of the right-wing discourse in the Arab region. World powers also started turning a blind eye to violations committed by right-wing regimes in the Arab region, which in turn gave more power to those regimes.

### **Conclusion:**

The rise of the right-wing in the aftermath of uprisings whose demands leaned towards the left seems illogical, yet examining the decades-long fragility of state institutions together with the failure of political actors to offer an alternative makes such a development quite logical. The rise of the right is also particularly logical in the light of the failure of the left to introduce a change. The same applied to Lebanon and Iraq when no alternative to the sectarian system was introduced. The rise to power of ISIS and the territories it occupied aggravated the situation as the fight against terrorism took precedence over political, social, and economic rights demanded by the uprisings. Right-wing factions took advantage of the situation to promote a discourse that sidelined those demands in favor of national security and the prevention of chaos.

Two questions pose themselves: Is this situation sustainable? And what are the chances of changing it?

Several of the factors that led to the rise of the right have started changing, even if slowly. The most important of those factors is the defeat of ISIS in Iraq, Syria, and Libya and their decline in the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt. This could signal a possible decline in the support garnered by right-wing parties as a result of their discourse on security and the fight against terrorism. The protest wave that swept both Sudan and Algeria is also a positive indication that people in the Arab region still long for political reform. Those protests were extremely timely since they erupted at the time when right-wing factions were tightening their grip on the region and when hopes for another revolution were crushed. The protests also brought back to the forefront the issue of political, social, and economic rights.

Despite the potential effect of those two factors, a decline in the influence of right-wing and populist factions is faced with two major challenges. The first is the weakness of state institutions in the Arab region, an issue that would require years to be fixed. The second is the performance of leftist factions, which can be improved on the short run if there is a will among those factions to rearrange their priorities and reconsider their discourse in a way that enables them to counter the influence of the right.



# The Emergence of the ‘New Right’ in Europe and its views on the main Arab issues

Gennaro Gervasio

## Introduction\*

After the defeat of the Nazi-fascist powers in World War II, a first ‘wave’ of Far-Right movements emerged in Europe -as well as elsewhere- in the ‘long 1960s’ and especially in the 1970s’ as a challenge to both the ‘New Cold War Order’ and to the emergence of the Revolutionary Leftist Movements.

In his provocative book *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*<sup>36</sup>, Canadian scholar Tamir Bar-On retraces the trajectory of the *European New Right* (ENR) from its post-WW2 formative years, to the most important developments in the subsequent decades. Bar-On aptly identifies the turning point in the 1968 protest movement, as the ENS would emerge in the 1970s as a reaction to the growth of the post-1968 Revolutionary Left, beginning with the birth of the *Front National* in France in 1972, by founder Jean-Marie Le Pen (born in 1928)<sup>37</sup>. From the outset, this New Right insisted on certain key-topics, besides a ‘reassessment’ of Fascism, such as: an almost obsessive reference to identity (versus Left’s internationalism), anti-intellectualism, Euro-centrism, and, in general, a conservative view of the world. From France the ENR spread – to some extent- to other Western European countries, like Italy, Greece, West Germany and Britain, and in some contexts – like Italy and Germany for example- an even more radical far-Right will embrace terrorism – against the State and against Far-Left movements- in the ‘long 1970s’ and early 1980s.<sup>38</sup>

The almost simultaneous end of the Cold War and ascent of Neo-liberalism<sup>39</sup> reinvigorated the New Right, and also prompted the emergence of a *nouvelle vague* or Right and far-Right movements, both in Western European countries and in the post-Socialist Eastern Europe. Suffice here to point at the Neo-Nazis in former East Germany and elsewhere.<sup>40</sup>

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\* I wish to thank Rossana Tufaro for her research assistance and comments.

<sup>36</sup> Tamir Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascist Gone?*, Routledge: London & New York, 2007.

<sup>37</sup> On the making of the FN, see also James Shields, *The extreme right in France: from Pétain to Le Pen* (Routledge: London & NY, 2007).

<sup>38</sup> K. von Beime, “Right-wing extremism in post-war Europe”, *West European Politics*, (11) 1988, pp. 1-18.

<sup>39</sup> The best critique of Neo-Liberalism from a leftist perspective is arguably David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2007.

<sup>40</sup> On the rise of the far-right in Eastern Europe, see Michael Minkenberg, “The Rise of the Radical Right in Eastern Europe: Between Mainstreaming and Radicalization”, *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*

After this brief historical background, the article will focus on the contemporary politics and ideological tenets of the European New Right, with a special comparative focus on the trajectories of France's *Rassemblement National* (RN) and Italy's *Lega Nord* (LN, now more commonly Lega).

### **Is the European Union moving to the Right?**

The May 2019 European Union (EU) elections represent a crucial test for the political balance within the EU Parliament. As a result of the wind of populism blowing in the 'Old Continent' in recent years, right and far right parties are arguably expected to see their electoral consensus rise significantly. According to a recent projection by ISPI/IAI<sup>41</sup>, the political coalition which should see the highest rise (+62.2%) is represented by the ENF (*Europe of Nations and Freedoms*) block.<sup>42</sup> Founded and led by Marine Le Pen (*Rassemblement Nationale*) and Matteo Salvini (*Lega Nord*) in 2015,<sup>43</sup> the alliance gathers together five other parties, i.e. *Alternative für Deutschland* (Germany), *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (Netherlands), *Kongres Nowej Prawicy* (Poland), *Vlaams Belang* (Belgium), *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (Austria), plus Janice Atkinson, an independent candidate from the United Kingdom.

Anyway, the RN and LN together hold about 70% of the block seats, as well as the ideological hegemony over the rest of the parties. This makes them a vantage point to look at possible scenarios, among other things, for the Euro-Mediterranean relations. And whilst, in spite of the rise in consensus of far-right parties, the overall composition of the EU parliament should not change substantially, the success that these parties are having at a national level will reasonably have an impact already in the short term.

In this respect, Italy and France are particularly relevant, as both countries represent key actors in the Euro-Mediterranean relations, with strong and historically rooted geopolitical and economic influences on the major countries of the Arab region, as well on the wider Middle East.

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(Volume 18, No. 1), 2017, <https://www.georgetownjournalofinternationalaffairs.org/online-edition/2017/12/22/the-rise-of-the-radical-right-in-eastern-europe-between-mainstreaming-and-radicalization>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/infografica-elezioni-europee-2019-come-cambia-il-parlamento-22319>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.enfgroup-ep.eu/>

<sup>43</sup> See *The Wall Street Journal*, 16/6/2015, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/marine-le-pen-and-geert-wilders-to-announce-far-right-bloc-1434440594>

In Italy, Lega Nord, since its access to the executive -together with the populist *Movimento 5 Stelle*- in June 2018, has seen its consensus rise from 17% to 33%, according to recent estimates. Likewise, the party is expected to be the most voted in Italy at the coming European elections, and it is already having the lion's share at the ongoing regional elections.<sup>44</sup> RN is also registering a growing success in France and, after 33% of votes in the past presidential elections, and 24% in the past EU ones, is expected to be confirmed as France's most voted party at the EU upcoming elections. Furthermore, with a Macron and *macronisme* in crisis, the party could possibly score even better in the next national electoral round.

### **RN and LN: a short comparative overview:**

RN (*Front National* formerly) and LN (currently Lega) come from two different political traditions. In fact, RN remounts to FN, the party founded in 1972 by Marine Le Pen father's Jean-Marie, as an emanation of the neo-fascist extra-parliamentary movement *Ordre Nouveau*. FN represented a rather marginal actor in the French political scene until the mid-1980s, mostly focusing on an identity discourse and a political agenda rooted in the European neo-fascist tradition. After its entrance in the French party system, FN reframed its nationalistic, conservative and xenophobic discourse in a much more populist sense, in the attempt to move beyond and away from Fascism. Such a process of 'cleaning' was pushed forward with much greater success with the rise of Marine Le Pen at the leadership of the party in 2011. Reframing nationalism and the migration and 'Islamic' questions in economic, anti-liberal and security terms, Marine succeeded in widening considerably the party constituency, turning the FN/RN into the most voted French party at the European level and herself into the second most voted candidate in the 2017 presidential election.

Regarding *Lega Nord*, the party was born under the leadership of the *Lega Lombarda* leader Umberto Bossi between 1989 and 1991, from the union of six already existing autonomist movements in Northern Italy. A 'permanent' member of the Italian Parliament since 1994, LN had the independence of Northern Italy as central core of its political programme, later 'softening' and transforming its main objective into the autonomy of the regions of the North, justified by both socio-economic and cultural reasons. LN's rise coincided with the collapse of the so-called First Republic political order as a result of a judicial enquiries ('Tangentopoli/Mani Pulite') which disrupted all the major existing political parties, hence opening the space for the entrance of new actors. Despite the centrality of the 'Northern

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<sup>44</sup> See <https://sputniknews.com/analysis/201902261072766701-sardinia-election-lega-right/>

question’, Islamophobic and xenophobic stances are part of the party’s discourse since the second half of the 1990s. As happened within RN after Marine’s rise to the leadership, when Matteo Salvini became General Secretary of LN in late 2013, both issues were reframed in less cultural/racial and more economic/security terms. This happened in parallel with the metamorphosis of the party from a regionalist to a nationalist one, which opened the way for an irresistible ascent of LN, culminating with the rise of Salvini to the Italian Vice-Premiership and the ‘conquest’ of several regions of the Southern and Central Italy, along with its historical Northern feuds in 2018 general elections.

In particular, with the change in leadership, the two parties have moved towards an increasingly convergent far-right 'populist sovereignty'. This opened the path for the formation of a tighter transnational political alliance, sealed in 2014 with the foundation of *Movement for a Europe of Nations and Freedom* (MENF),<sup>45</sup> and the satellite coalition ENF the following year.

The basic ideological assumptions of the two parties are summarized in the five programmatic keywords of MENF, namely: democracy, sovereignty, identity, specificity, and freedom.<sup>46</sup>

Whilst the insertion of *democracy*, i.e. the «conformity with the democratic principles and the charter of fundamental rights», and the simultaneous rejection by its affiliates of «any past or present affiliation, connection or sympathy to any authoritarian or totalitarian project» is the best proof of the huge effort of the two parties to clean their image from the heavy burden of the past, the main axes of MENF ideology are to be found under the ‘sovereignty’ and ‘identity’ captions.

For the New Right, *sovereignty* means above all the firm pursuing of ‘closed-borders’ immigration policies, and the consequent emphasis on borders’ defense. At EU policy level, this has resulted in MENF’s firm opposition to the Global Compact for Immigration signed by the European leaders in Marrakech on December 2018.<sup>47</sup> At a national level, this has found its major translation in the “Security Decree” approved by the Italian government in 2018<sup>48</sup>, enforcing significant restrictions on the humanitarian protection and the asylum right, as well as the reinforcement of the Italian maritime borders<sup>49</sup> and of the controversial collaboration

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<sup>45</sup> <https://www.menleuropa.eu/>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.menleuropa.eu/platform>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.enfgroup-ep.eu/global-compact-for-immigration-bad-for-europe/>

<sup>48</sup> [https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/11/27/news/scheda\\_dl\\_sicurezza\\_stretta\\_su\\_immigrazione\\_e\\_mafia-212803810/](https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/11/27/news/scheda_dl_sicurezza_stretta_su_immigrazione_e_mafia-212803810/)

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-44668062>

with the Libyan coastguard to prevent migrants debarking on the Italian shores.<sup>50</sup> The same principle has been evoked by both parties to push for a restrictive revision of the Schengen Treaty,<sup>51</sup> as well as to redefine the space of maneuver of Italy and France vis-a-vis the EU and NATO foreign policy<sup>52</sup>, in favor of an approach to Putin's Russia. At the economic level, emphasis on sovereignty is being translated into the support of protectionist/corporatist and production oriented economic policies, a firm opposition to free-trade supra-national agreements such as CETA and TTIP, and, above all, the adoption of so-called 'Euro-skeptical positions'.

*Identity*, complementing the principle of sovereignty, is the second ideological cornerstone of the alliance, which implies first and foremost «the right to control and regulate immigration». This notion of identity is deeply embedded in the far-right mythology of the white and Christian roots of the old continent, and is particularly important to shape and reiterate Islamophobic positions, so to legitimize both repressive security policies on the domestic front (higher securitization of the public spaces, higher controls on private citizens), and closed-borders policies on the international one. The centrality of Islamophobic discourses and practices for both LN and RN clearly emerges looking at the space that the 'Islamic question' occupies in their speeches and political programs. It is not a case that support for the parties has significantly risen in concomitance with the increase of immigration from the Arab Region in the aftermath of the Arab Revolutions.

## **The New Right and the Arab World:**

### **a. The Arab- Israeli conflict:**

Following the recent 'tradition' of pro-Israeli alignment embraced by most Italian parties, Matteo Salvini has generally been sympathetic towards the Jewish state. His public support to Israel, however, has become more explicit in parallel with his political ascent into government. As a matter of fact, whilst until 2016 LN's support has remained pretty on the margins of its foreign agenda, since his first visit to Israel in 2016, Salvini has done constant efforts to consolidate his party's relations with the Jewish state. During the first visit, Salvini openly praised Israel demographic and defense policies as "a model to follow for what concerns

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<sup>50</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/23/mother-and-child-drown-after-being-abandoned-off-libya-says-ngo>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.thelocal.fr/20170412/le-pen-plans-to-ditch-schengen-deal-for-france>

<sup>52</sup> <https://rassemblementnational.fr/communiqués/integration-toujours-plus-poussee-de-la-france-dans-lotan-lindependance-nationale-gravement-menacee/>

security, immigration and the war on terrorism”.<sup>53</sup> The same positions have been reiterated during his more recent visit (December 2018) as Minister of Interior, since the consolidation of the relationship with Israel was also part of his electoral program in 2018, by virtue of the latter’s ‘relentless engagement shown in the war against Islamic fundamentalism’. Israel alleged anti-Islamist engagement is also being used by LN as a major justification to bridge the contradiction between its engagement in favor of the defense of the “sovereignty of nations and people” and its pro-Israel alignment vis-a-vis the Palestinian question. The position towards the Arab-Israeli conflict has been clarified during an ad-hoc Parliamentary Question of 2015, during which *Lega Nord* rejected any unilateral attempt to recognize Palestine as an independent nation State.<sup>54</sup> According to LN, no resolution of the question can be achieved without the dialogue between Israel and Palestine. Furthermore, the peace process cannot be separated by a strong contrast of Hamas. The positioning of the party in favor of a two/single or no State solution is maintained deliberately ambiguous.

With regards to RN, the leadership of Marine has marked a sharp change in the party’s stance vis-à-vis Israel. Under the leadership of Jean-Marie Le Pen, the party – maybe for its fascist anti-Semitic upbringing - was characterized by a marked anti-Zionist and pro-Palestinian position. On the contrary, Marine has deployed a great effort in favour of the normalization of the relations with the Jewish state. It must be noted that also for Le Pen junior such a process ran in parallel with her political ascent. A first approach occurred in 2014, when she ran for President for the first time, with several FN MPs explicitly recognizing for the first time the right of Israel to exist and defend itself.<sup>55</sup> A stronger endorsement was then given in 2017, at the time of Marine’s second presidential bid, when the right of Israel to exist and to defend was remarked by herself in an interview to an Israeli TV. Here again, endorsement is justified evoking both the ghosts of the Islamic terrorism and the ‘holy right’ to border defense.<sup>56</sup>

#### **b. The Arab Uprisings and their aftermath:**

The European New Right parties, coherently with their ideological linchpins, welcomed with worry the Arab Uprisings in 2010/11, especially when the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) won the

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<sup>53</sup> <http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/politica/2016/03/30/la-prima-di-salvini-in-israelee-modello-sicurezza-f3692753-52e0-4445-b2f3-787586db10b1.html>

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.leganord.org/notizie/le-news-2/13791-palestina-mozione-lega-no-stato-sovrano-senza-intesa-con-israele>

<sup>55</sup> <https://rassemblementnational.fr/terme/palestine/>

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.europe-israel.org/2017/02/marine-le-pen-reconnait-pour-la-premiere-fois-aux-israeliens-le-droit-de-defendre-leurs-interets-nationaux-comme-aux-americains-et-aux-francais/>

elections in Egypt in 2011 and 2012, and after the rise of even more radical Islamist forces in other Arab Uprisings countries, such as Tunisia, Libya, Yemen and especially Syria.

Lega Nord and RN stances vis-à-vis Egypt are deeply convergent. Having expressed a deep concern after the victory of Mohammad Morsi in 2012, both parties have hailed with enthusiasm the coup of al-Sisi in July 2013, considering him as a crucial partner for the maintenance of the stability in the Mediterranean. Both Salvini (2018) and Le Pen (2015) have paid visit to the Egyptian president. In both cases, the evident contradiction between the support to al-Sisi's ultra-repressive regime and their formal rejection of any «connection or sympathy to any authoritarian or totalitarian project» is covered, by evoking Egypt's engagement against the 'Islamist threat',<sup>57</sup> as well as its alleged containment in the control of migratory flows. As in the case of Israel, the improvement of the relations with Egypt was part of LN electoral programme in 2018, in spite of its lack of cooperation in the achievement of truth and justice for the murder of Italian doctoral student Giulio Regeni in Cairo in early 2016<sup>58</sup>.

Unlike RN, Lega Nord is deeply interested in the evolution of the post-2011 Tunisian politics, as Tunisia represents a key area for the migratory routes towards Italy as well as a very important economic partner. This is why Salvini paid an official visit to Tunisia in September 2018, in order to consolidate economic, migratory and security cooperation. The visit came after a moment of diplomatic tension between the two countries, opened by a declaration of Salvini in June of the same year, accusing Tunis to send to Italy 'not only gentlemen, but also felons', and to which Tunisia answered with an official complaint to the Italian ambassador in Tunisia.<sup>59</sup>

As for Egypt, also with Syria and Libya, the positions of LN and RN are very close. Indeed, both parties have been pretty critical of the French-British military intervention of 2011,<sup>60</sup> which have both condemned as severe interference in the affairs of another sovereign state, originating the current chaos. In particular, both leaders blame the 'regime change' in Tripoli for having deprived the Mediterranean region of a 'stabilizing leader' (al-Qadhafi), crucial for

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<sup>57</sup> [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2015/05/30/marine-le-pen-en-egypte-un-pays-arabe-anti-islamiste\\_4644003\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2015/05/30/marine-le-pen-en-egypte-un-pays-arabe-anti-islamiste_4644003_3212.html)

<sup>58</sup> [http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cronaca/2018/07/18/regeni-salvini-da-egitto-risposte-certe-in-breve-tempo\\_c1f93b9f-e329-4866-833a-574fbb0a2390.html](http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cronaca/2018/07/18/regeni-salvini-da-egitto-risposte-certe-in-breve-tempo_c1f93b9f-e329-4866-833a-574fbb0a2390.html)

<sup>59</sup> [http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/mondo/2018/06/04/tunisia-profondo-stupore-per-frasi-salvini\\_1b2fe07d-dd3a-4d5b-a868-650f7b5405b1.html](http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/mondo/2018/06/04/tunisia-profondo-stupore-per-frasi-salvini_1b2fe07d-dd3a-4d5b-a868-650f7b5405b1.html)

<sup>60</sup> <https://rassemblementnational.fr/terme/libye/>; <https://www.lastampa.it/2011/03/18/italia/l-italia-pronta-ai-raid-sulla-libia-si-bipartisan-ma-la-lega-non-vota-jdIxmtUGSfKs2nhp2aaphN/pagina.html>

the containment of both the Islamist threat and the migratory flows.<sup>61</sup> The question of the management of migrants in particular is central for the Italian government, which has opened and enhanced several partnerships and cooperation projects with the Libyan authorities, also with the previous government (under the Democratic Party) in Rome, regardless of the blatant disrespect of human rights registered in the Libyan migrant detention centers. This partnership has been further enhanced by Salvini after his appointment as Ministry of the Interior in 2018, which has been the object of a new ad hoc mission in the country on June 2018,<sup>62</sup> further perfected with the visit of the Libyan vice-premier Ahmad Maitiq to Italy two weeks later.<sup>63</sup> This has been followed by a series of maneuvers of rapprochement of the Italian government with General Haftar.<sup>64</sup> This politics of conciliation has been read by many observers as an attempt of Italy to re-gain terrain over France after the Macron-sponsored Conference of Paris on Libya held on May 2018, which has marked a first rapprochement between Sarraj and Haftar, and between France and Haftar, and to which Italy has responded with another conference held in Palermo in November, where both Libyan leaders did participate.<sup>65</sup> While endorsing Haftar, Marine Le Pen criticized Macron's initiative for Libya, which she saw as another 'interventionist' illegitimate maneuver, especially for what concerned the imposition of elections 'from above'.<sup>66</sup>

With regards to Syria, both leaders show support for Bashar al-Asad, which is seen here again as a major actor for the contrast to radical Islam, the protector of Christians in the Middle East and, at a broader level, as a legitimate interlocutor for the political future of the state.<sup>67</sup> In both cases, the implicit support for an Asadist solution to the Syrian civil war is justified by the logic of the 'lesser evil'.<sup>68</sup> Both leaders have shown a firm opposition to the US bombings over Syria, echoing Putin's 'politics of suspicion' vis-a-vis the detention and use of chemical weapons by Asad, and have asserted the centrality of the involvement of Russia for the

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<sup>61</sup> <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/ce-que-pensent-emmanuel-macron-et-marine-le-pen,1843>

<sup>62</sup> [https://www.agi.it/politica/migranti\\_salvini\\_libia-4069759/news/2018-06-25/](https://www.agi.it/politica/migranti_salvini_libia-4069759/news/2018-06-25/)

<sup>63</sup> [https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2018/06/25/news/salvini\\_libia\\_migranti\\_visita\\_tripoli-199990527/](https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2018/06/25/news/salvini_libia_migranti_visita_tripoli-199990527/)

<sup>64</sup> [http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/mondo/2018/12/05/ansa-haftar-a-roma-il-generale-libico-domani-vede-conte\\_0f690fff-5a64-42b9-8243-f5d5a2be9ff7.html](http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/mondo/2018/12/05/ansa-haftar-a-roma-il-generale-libico-domani-vede-conte_0f690fff-5a64-42b9-8243-f5d5a2be9ff7.html)

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/11/19/the-palermo-conference-on-libya-a-diplomatic-test-for-italys-new-government/>

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.secoloditalia.it/2018/12/libia-destabilizzata-da-francia-e-ue-haftar-e-in-italia-per-salvare-il-suo-paese/>

<sup>67</sup> <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/ce-que-pensent-emmanuel-macron-et-marine-le-pen,1843>

<sup>68</sup> [https://www.lepoint.fr/presidentielle/marine-le-pen-fait-un-parallele-entre-bachar-al-assad-et-staline-07-04-2017-2118123\\_3121.php](https://www.lepoint.fr/presidentielle/marine-le-pen-fait-un-parallele-entre-bachar-al-assad-et-staline-07-04-2017-2118123_3121.php)



resolution of the conflict.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, since January 2019, the Italian government is been considering the re-opening of the Italian Embassy in Damascus, closed in 2012.

It is worth mentioning that the ‘ghost of Islamism’ evoked by RN/LN to promote both their repressive and ‘sovereignist’ domestic policies, and the support of authoritarian Arab regimes, is quickly ‘forgotten’ when more important geopolitical or economic interests are at stake. With regards to Italy, a case in point is represented by the changing attitude of Salvini towards Qatar after his rise to the executive branch. As much as Marine Le Pen, Matteo Salvini has historically assumed very critical positions vis-a-vis Gulf-monarchies, particularly Qatar and Saudi Arabia, accused to be the major funders of global Islamic terrorism and of Islamist propaganda. Until 2017, Salvini sharply criticised Qatar on several occasions, up to the point of asking for the suspension of the diplomatic relations of Italy with the country in the aftermath of the decision of Saudi Arabia, UA Emirates, Egypt and Bahrein to break their relations with Qatar.<sup>70</sup> During an official visit to Doha in October 2018, though, Salvini did not hesitate to praise the emirate as an example of democracy ‘where Islamic fundamentalism has no place’. Economic relations between Italy and Qatar have in fact intensified in recent years, so turning the Gulf country into a strategic partner.<sup>71</sup>

With regards to Le Pen, she keeps a strong critical position towards Saudi Arabia and Qatar, whilst she praises the UAE as an ‘example of moderate Islam actively engaged, as much as Egypt, in fighting global Islamic terrorism’.<sup>72</sup>

To conclude, the two parties here considered are arguably important examples of the European New Right, and maybe can offer some lessons to reflect upon. Firstly, it is clear that they are ready to compromise on some ideological tenets to reach power, both domestically and at a foreign policy level.

Secondly, at the Euro-Mediterranean level, whilst the xenophobic and especially Islamophobic domestic and continental positions can help explaining the support for the Arab counter-Revolutionary regimes such as Egypt, as allies in the ‘common fight against terrorism’, these

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<sup>69</sup> <https://www.bfmtv.com/politique/marine-le-pen-sur-la-syrie-on-nous-a-deja-fait-le-coup-avec-l-irak-1417899.html>

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2018/10/30/il-qatar-fiancheggiata-i-terroristi-anzi-no-salvini-cambia-idea-oracle-gli-serve/4731611/>

<sup>71</sup> <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/salvini-sdogana-qatar-investimenti-italia-e-sostegno-libia-1595284.html>

<sup>72</sup> <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/ce-que-pensent-emmanuel-macron-et-marine-le-pen,1843>

stances are increasingly blatantly contradicted by the ongoing convergence with the Gulf States.

The picture given above, with the rise of New Right movements in Europe and their convergence with authoritarian forces in the Arab Region, may be certainly gloomy but resistance to these policies and alliances is also increasingly active, in the streets and elsewhere, in Europe<sup>73</sup> as well as in the Middle East and North Africa.

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<sup>73</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/25/world/europe/pro-europe-letter.html>

## Global anti-right movements: The quest for Arab resistance

Wael Gamal

### The populist right-wing: The crisis and the rise:

Capitalist countries are currently going through their toughest crisis in decades with the decline of the liberal, representational model and the rise of the populist right that has now spread through Europe, Asia, and Latin America. The coming to power of Donald Trump in 2016 constituted a major turning point and signaled the start of the growing influence of right-wing trends that base their policies on neoliberal economics and an anti-immigrant discourse while focusing on national identity and culture and promoting conspiracy theories. Several countries in Europe saw the rise of such trend starting with Austria in 2017 followed by Italy and others. This phenomenon is not confined to Western Europe and the United States, but manages to extend to different parties of world, which is demonstrated in the cases of the Philippines, Brazil, Hungary, and Egypt. Right-wing trends differ according to context and background, but they share a number of common traits such as promoting xenophobia, adopting neoliberal policies and imposing austerity measures, the decline of the role of the state in public services, and hostility towards civil society and the press. This trend also usually adopts a white supremacist and anti-gay discourse and antagonize the marginalized in general.

Right-wing factions of different types are also against pluralism: “Populists claim that they, and they alone, represent the people”<sup>74</sup>. In other words, “populists do not claim ‘we are the 99 percent.’ What they imply instead is ‘We are the 100 percent’”<sup>75</sup>. Populism, therefore, is a direct threat to democracy, which is based on pluralism. Populism, instead, divides society into two camps: the people, their supporters, on one hand and corrupt political factions and conspirators on the other hand<sup>76</sup>.

There are no fixed terms used when referring to those trends, for they can be populist, populist right-wing, fascist, neo-fascist, neoliberal authoritarian right-wing, national populist... etc. While some argue that populism is an ideology in itself<sup>77</sup>, there are still debates about how it can be defined and when a political player can be labelled populist. Those debates led to the

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<sup>74</sup> Jan-Werner Muller. *What Is Populism?* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Uri Friedman. “What Is a Populist? And is Donald Trump one?” *The Atlantic*, February 27, 2017: <https://is.gd/o5QHhM>

<sup>77</sup> Roger Eatwell & Matthew Goodwin. *National Populism: The Revolt against Liberal Democracy*. London, Penguin, 2018.

absence of a unified theory on populism. Fascism, for example, is based on the political and economic restructuring of society, which is not the case with populism. Populism criticizes the political institution as a whole but does not offer an alternative. That is why it is always associated with other predefined ideologies such as socialism or nationalism<sup>78</sup>. Populism is, therefore,

[A] way of doing politics that can take various ideological forms according to both time and place, and is compatible with a variety of institutional framework. We can speak of a ‘populist moment’ when, under the pressure of political or socioeconomic transformations, the dominant hegemony is being destabilized by the multiplication of unsatisfied demands. In such a situation, the existing institutions fail to secure the allegiance of the people as they attempt to defend the existing order.<sup>79</sup>

That is why it is difficult to define populism without linking it to another stronger ideology such as fascism or the like. Many populist factions are, in fact, fascist and promote white supremacy or at times are linked to some military coup or another. However, rising populist trends are mostly referred to as “right-wing populism” or “extreme right”<sup>80</sup>.

The context in which a populist trend rises and the reasons it grows influential are important factors that need to be examined when tackling any of those trends. Populist trends rose before the 2007-2008 global financial crisis even though the crisis played a major role in the growing influence of those trends. However, the context in which populist trends gained ground is different from that which led to the rise of fascism in the aftermath of the financial crisis that took place in the 1930s. In the latter case, fascism was the means through which ruling classes countered the impact of leftist and revolutionary parties and trade unions that gave leverage to hundreds of thousands of workers. This is not the case in the present time owing to the absence of such parties that used to represent the poor and the marginalized.

Both, however, were the result of a financial crisis. Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin identify the “4Ds” that lead to the rise of populism: “distrust” in state institutions and political elites, fear of the “destruction” caused by minorities, immigrants, or external conspiracies, “deprivation” caused by austerity measures, inequality, and the impoverishment of workers

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<sup>78</sup> Cas Mudde. “How Populism became the Concept that defines our age.” *The Guardian*, November 22, 2018: <https://is.gd/cxXQ8t>

<sup>79</sup> Chantal Mouffe. “For a Left Populism.” London: Verso, 2018.

<sup>80</sup> Cas Mudde. Op. cit.

and the middle class, and “de-alignment” from conventional political parties<sup>81</sup>. The development of neoliberalism in the past few years contributed to the rise of populist trends<sup>82</sup>. After decades of changes that took place in capitalist welfare countries, neoliberalism failed, both as a political system and as an alleged development of capitalism, to provide the required level of welfare and solve the problems incurred by capital accumulation, which in turn led to lack of stability, hence paving the way for the rise of the right-wing or, in other words, neoliberal authoritarianism<sup>83</sup>. According to Francis Fukuyama, the rise of the populist right is directly related to the failure of political and economic liberalism both before and after the global financial crisis. This failure is particularly demonstrated in inequality in the distribution of income and wealth and the way political elites monopolized the decision-making process<sup>84</sup>.

In response to the rise of the populist right, several resistance movements emerged in an attempt to find an alternative. These included newly-formed groups such as Podemos in Spain and the restructuring of already existing political parties such as the Labor Party in the UK and Syriza in Greece. Other initiatives have not yet taken shape such as different groups that emerged in support of potential Democratic candidate Bernie Sanders. This paper examines the context in which those resistance initiatives emerged in order to counter the influence of the populist right, the common traits they share, and the challenges they face on both the organizational and political levels. The paper also looks at lessons learnt from countries which were controlled by the populist right in the Arab world in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution, which is the case in Egypt for example.

### **Resisting the populist right: Seattle to Syriza and Sanders:**

In an interview with BBC on March 12, 2019, Indian economist and former chief economist and director of research at the International Monetary Fund Raghuram Rajan said, “I think capitalism is under serious threat because it's stopped providing for the many, and when that happens, the many revolt against capitalism”<sup>85</sup>. This threat was demonstrated in the report issued by the White House in October 2018 to prove that economic and tax policies proposed

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<sup>81</sup> Roger Eatwell & Matthew Goodwin. Op. cit.

<sup>82</sup> Salvatore Babones. *The New Authoritarianism: Trump, Populism, and the Tyranny of Experts*. London: Polity Press, 2018.

<sup>83</sup> Marco Boffo and Alfredo Saad-Filho. “Neoliberal Capitalism: The Authoritarian Turn.” In Leo Panitch and Greg Albo, *Socialist Register 2019: A World Turned Upside Down?* London, Merlin Press, 2018.

<sup>84</sup> Wael Gamal. “Fukuyama and history that would not end here [Arabic].” *Al-Shorouk*, March 17, 2019: <https://is.gd/revHxs>

<sup>85</sup> *BBC News*, March 12, 2019: <https://is.gd/HC9KSo>

by American socialists are not applicable<sup>86</sup>. In February 2019, US President Donald Trump asserted in the State of the Union Address that the United States will never become a socialist country<sup>87</sup>. A few days later, the British conservative magazine *The Economist* dedicated an entire issue to what it called “Millennial socialism” and to criticize the economic program proposed by American socialists<sup>88</sup>.

Resistance to neoliberal capitalism, which started taking shape in the late 1990s, also started before the global financial crisis with the emergence of the Anti-Globalization Movement in Seattle in 1999, followed by the war on Iraq and Afghanistan. This was paralleled by a series of political and economic struggles in Latin America, which culminated in a wave of uprisings that swept Argentina then Ecuador and Venezuela and the coming to power of Lula da Silva in Brazil. That phase in Latin America was known as the “pink tide,” the name used to refer to the revolutionary wave that brought leftist governments to power and created a blend between social movements and political parties. In Bolivia, Ecuador, and at certain phases in Venezuela, grassroots democracy and the rights of indigenous communities were among the main pillars of governance.

The 2011 uprisings started in Tunisia and Egypt, which had at the time adopted several neoliberal policies and were praised by international financial institutions. It is necessary in this regard to examine the link and overlap between Arab uprisings and popular movements that spread in different parts of the world, including Britain, Greece, the Philippines, and Spain, in addition to the emergence of the Occupy Movement in the United States. The latter was largely inspired by Arab revolutions.

The reasons that led to the emergence of those movements are different. In London, riots erupted as a result of austerity measures and discrimination while in Greece protests started because of debts and in the United States because of the dominance of the financial sector. In the Arab world, protests were staged against impoverishment, exploitation, and authoritarianism. The common trait all those movements shared was what Paul Mason called “error de Sistema,” an operation failure whose negative impacts drove people to take to the streets: “From California to Cairo, it is certain that the rising generation will be materially

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<sup>86</sup> CEA Report: The Opportunity Costs of Socialism, October 23, 2018: <https://is.gd/ZYVtOx>

<sup>87</sup> “President Donald J. Trump’s State of the Union Address.” February 5, 2019: <https://is.gd/qWHyRA>

<sup>88</sup> *The Economist*, February 14, 2019: <https://is.gd/hXUEqs>

poorer than those that came before. Even if we do not have a deflationary slump, 1930s-style, countries like Greece will experience 1930s levels of austerity”<sup>89</sup> .

Resistance to neoliberalism and the rise of populist trends took different shapes. These included the victory Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labor Party in the UK, movements like Me Too and Black Lives Matter, movements supporting immigrants and teachers’ strikes, support for Bernie Sanders’ candidacy and the subsequent emergence of a socialist wing within the Democratic Party, the Yellow Jackets protests in France, and protests against price hikes in Sudan.

### **Similarities and differences of movements and rhetoric:**

Social movements and political factions that adopted leftist ideologies share a number of traits. These include opposing austerity measures, class disparities, and neoliberal policies that widen the gap between classes in terms of the distribution of wealth and income. Regarding tax policies, most of those movements agree that higher taxes should be imposed on the rich<sup>90</sup>. They also demand more spending on education and healthcare, countering the growing influence of the financial sector, represented by big corporations and banks in the US and the UK, and reversing the effects they have on indebted countries such as Greece and Spain.

While the economic aspect is always dominant, it is always tackled from a political perspective, which is demonstrated in the discourse against corporations, class distinction, discrimination, and climate change and support for women rights and democracy. Another common trait is the association between the movements that initiated in the streets and organizations, which is the case with the US, Greece, and Spain. In fact, this link played a major role in allowing those organizations to gain ground. The use of social networks in addition to conventional political actions such as addressing people directly allowed those movements to expand on a large scale, which was particularly the case with Corbyn and Sanders.

Those anti-capitalist movements differ, however, in their organizational structures. Podemos started from street protests in Spain then became a political party that took part in elections.

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<sup>89</sup> Paul Mason. *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions*. London: Verso, 2011.

<sup>90</sup> Bernie Sanders. *Our Revolution: A Future to Believe In*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2016.

Bernie Sanders, “Where We Go from Here”, New York, Thomas Dunne Books, 2018.

Íñigo Errejón and Chantal Mouffe. *Podemos: In the Name of the People*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2016.

Labour Party Manifesto 2017: <https://is.gd/DYaF2L>

Richard Seymour. *Corbyn: The Strange Rebirth of Radical Politics*. London: Verso, 2017.

Costas Lapavistas and Stathis Kouvelakis. “Syriza’s Repressive Turn.” *Verso Blog*, October 8, 2018.

Syriza emerged in 2004 as a coalition of leftist Greek parties and came to power in 2015. Corbyn represented a radical left-wing camp within the Labor Party in Britain while Sanders' camp took shape through his electoral campaign. When Podemos and Syriza became part of the political scene, their popularity was questioned especially that many of the reforms that made them popular were not implemented on the ground. The Syriza government was also put under a lot of pressure by entities whose interests were to be harmed by proposed reforms. This was particularly the case with international financial institutions and their representatives in Germany and France. Meanwhile, Corbyn and Sanders are still engaged in fierce battles especially as the impact of Brexit unravels and Trump's policies gain more ground.

### **Political and organizational challenges:**

According to Fukuyama, the left is to be largely blamed for the rise of the populist right because it focused on the rights of the marginalized instead of broadening the scope of their activism to class struggle or social reform. This led to the existence of a vacuum that was quickly filled with different populist factions, ranging from ISIS to the Hungarian Freedom Party. It is important to note that all the previously-mentioned leftist movements started with economic issues that they did link to broader problems such as exploitation and class distinction. However, the "pink tide" in Latin America started receding and reached its peak with the coming to power of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. Meanwhile, Syriza did not implement the reforms that led to its electoral victory and was forced to resort to loans and austerity measures. Such developments constitute examples of the challenges faced by movements that resist populism.

One of the major challenges that faces anti-populist movements is how far they would be capable of implementing their political and economic programs if they come to power. In the cases of Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Greece, coming to power meant dealing with institutions that have for decades been designed to serve capitalist interests and to facilitate exploitation, and the new ruling party was faced with the extremely challenging task of changing this structure. They were also faced with the question of offering a viable political and economic alternative in case they succeed in such task, one that responds to the demands of social movements and marginalized segments of society.

The contradictions inherent in the capitalist system, which is based on both representational democracy and neoliberal authoritarianism, rendered the revision of approaches to countering capitalism necessary according to many analysts. Chantal Mouffe, for example, notes that while she initially thought the right-wing should be resisted by the left-wing, she discovered



that this is no longer applicable to a world swept by the populist right. She believes, instead, that the populist right should be resisted through the emergence of another populist camp that adopts a leftist discourse within a progressive, democratic framework<sup>91</sup>. However, this form of populism will bear no fruit if it does not have the power to target the centers of hegemony that are the main source of exploitation, class distinction, and marginalization.

Anti-capitalist movements are always faced with organizational challenges that differ based on the context, balance of power, and popular support. One of the major challenges in this regard is the type of democracy practiced within each movement and within the society in which it operates as well as the relationship between the political party and the popular movements from which it emerged or which represent its main popular case.

### **Conclusion:**

The rise of counter-revolutionary trends and the decline in the objectives of the 2011 uprisings in the Arab world coincided with the emergence of the populist right across the world. The coming to power of Donald Trump in 2016 played a major role in supporting the rise of the authoritarian right-wing in the Arab region, which is demonstrated in the case of Egypt. The past few years also witnessed the adoption of austerity measures in coordination with the International Monetary Fund in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, Iraq, and Sudan. Another form of a populist right started coming to light with the emergence of extremist groups such as ISIS.

Populist trends in the Arab region are faced with the repercussions of the global capitalist crisis from a more critical position. The failure of neoliberal policies does not only mean inability to respond to the demands of the majority, but also to address major pressing issues such as economic activity and the accumulation of capital. Added to this is the persistence of old problems on larger scales, including social disparities and exploitation as well as lack of trust in the state, which in turn lead to instability and a fiercer form of authoritarianism. The emergence of a new form of fascism, hence, becomes a possibility<sup>92</sup>. In light of such developments, there is no way out except learning from the lessons of 2011 and from global anti-capitalist experiences with both their advantages and drawbacks in order to be able to

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<sup>91</sup> Chantal Mouffe. Op. cit.

<sup>92</sup> Marco Boffo and Alfredo Saad-Filho. Op. cit.

develop a form of resistance that can address the impact of populism and neoliberalism in accordance with each context.