

Iraq, Syria and beyond... Comments and discussion on the situation in the Middle East

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What are the real responsibilities of American imperialism?

Rarely has a situation been so dramatic and so complicated to decipher. It is a new situation, where an entire region is now engulfed in war and chaos; a new situation dominated by the emergence of the barbarism embodied by Daesh, the dislocation of states like Iraq, Syria, Libya and tomorrow Lebanon, by massacres of populations, by the dictatorial regime in Syria and today by Western intervention. This intervention of Western imperialism is not a repetition of the interventions in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, with the conquest of territories, economic objectives such as oil, the sending in of ground troops. It seems that there is no pre-determined plan; the objectives of war are not under control. They have intervened in an emergency. The situation will, of course, evolve and its destructive ramifications will alter policies on all sides.

The historical and political responsibility of the USA and the Western powers is overwhelming. Over the long term, the failure or bankruptcy of Arab nationalist regimes also explains the explosion of the barbarism of groups like Daesh and Al Qaeda. The American invasion of Iraq in 2003 destroyed the country and destabilized the entire region. But today the analysis of the situation and the policies that must flow from it cannot be reduced to the denunciation of Western imperialism. The present situation can only be understood by taking into account multiple overlapping conflicts and wars that combine with Western intervention and the role of other powers such as Russia and regional powers like Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey.

Let us note:

- The dislocation of the Iraqi state and the conflict between the corrupt Shiite- dominated government and Daesh, which has drawn towards itself some Sunni tribes and segments of the former army of Saddam Hussein. The conflict has a third dimension, with the attack of the jihadists against the Kurds and their organizations.
- The war in Syria between the dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad and the Islamist factions, including Daesh, but also the Free Syrian Army (FSA) expressing the initial dynamics of the popular rebellion, which is weakened but still exists in a series of towns and villages. We should note the manoeuvres of the dictatorship with Daesh and Al Nusra (Al Qaeda) with the aim of breaking the democratic

rebellion.

- The interventions and manoeuvres of regional powers like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey who armed the jihadists, even directly the Daesh bands, against the Syrian regime. The latter being supported in its turn by Iran and the Hezbollah militias. These militias have more than once saved the regime.
- The Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip, a result of the extreme rightward evolution of Israeli politics and society. The settler organizations representing the spearhead of this Zionist far right. The refusal by the Israeli government of any serious negotiation and compromise with the Palestinians is part and parcel of the counter-revolutionary chaos in the region.

This interweaving of conflicts is the result of the destructive interference of the imperialist powers, but also of their weakening and their decline in the region, which gives more autonomy and space to these multiple counter-revolutionary forces.

Let us recall the presence and the strength of American imperialism throughout the region from the early 1990s to the late 2000s, culminating in the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and compare it to the current situation.

The United States has withdrawn most of its troops from Iraq and is in the process of withdrawing from Afghanistan on the basis of a political and military defeat. This defeat was also amplified by the democratic uprisings in the 2010s. It caused the hesitations and changes of position that we have seen in the last period: indirect intervention in Libya, where it was the French and British governments that were in the front line; changing positions several times in Egypt (support for Mubarak, then for the Muslim Brotherhood and now Sissi); hesitation over Syria where Washington, while denouncing the regime, has been careful not to weaken it too much so that it can continue to contain the democratic aspirations of its people and also the Islamist pressure.

The refusal, by the Western powers in particular, to help the democratic rebellion is a major reason for the upsurge of jihadists in Syria and Iraq.

Today, in this galaxy of counter-revolutions, the barbaric monster Daesh has become too important, too numerous, too well-armed for the imperialist powers. It is going too far in the genocide of minorities such as the Yezidis, the Kurds and the Christians. It is going too far in its pretention to occupy territorial positions in Iraq and Syria. It is going too far in seizing oil-producing areas. It is necessary to contain it, weaken it and destroy its military capabilities. The Western powers, like most of the regional powers, each for its own reasons, have decided to intervene.

But the enemy of the peoples is not only Western intervention, but another imperialist power like Russia, which supports the Syrian regime. And also the other regional powers - the Gulf states - and the corrupt regimes in the region. But today, it is above all Daesh, which is the "Islamofascist" (although this characterization is certainly partial) concentrate of this barbarism in the region. It is crucial to show our solidarity with the peoples of the region, especially the most oppressed peoples - the Syrian, the Kurds - to denounce all these "counter-revolutions", all these enemies and not to be silent about the "barbarians" or to explain their criminal activities as just a consequence of Western imperialist intervention. They have their own responsibility, which is felt in their flesh by tens of thousands of victims.

The Middle East dominated by counter-revolutions?

The intervention of the West and the powers of the region can be explained primarily by the need to crush the “Frankenstein monster” that has escaped from its masters: Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other regimes in the region. But we cannot understand this situation, either the development of Daesh or these imperialist “new initiatives”, without analyzing the present moment of the “Arab revolutions”. The concept of a long-term revolutionary process reflects in fact the chronic instability, the mass movements that rebound, the structural crisis of the ruling classes. But this long-term analysis should not lead us to neglect the analysis of the present moment. Although partial movements or strikes, or new mobilizations, as in Yemen, can appear here and there, it is clear that the situation today is polarized by a confrontation between “military dictatorship” and “Islamist forces” or even “inter-Islamist” factional struggles, as is the case in Libya. But, unfortunately, the situation is also determined by the clash between the military dictatorship of Sissi and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the war in Syria of the dictator Bashar Al Assad against a rebellion now dominated by Islamists, a dislocation of the Iraqi state between Shiites, Sunnites and Kurds. And in this confrontation, the forces that dominate are those of the counter-revolution, military or Islamic. It is the retreat of the revolutionary processes that also explains the moment chosen by Israel to intervene in Gaza.

The only country that escapes such confrontation is Tunisia, although we should not underestimate what the Islamist forces, such as Enhad, represent. But Tunisia, which moreover started off the Arab revolutions, has been able, through its social and democratic popular mobilizations and the existence of a workers’ movement and of a major trade union movement, the UGTT, to contain the Islamists. A revolutionary process must be analyzed over the long term, so it is wrong to speak of an “Islamist or military winter” after having announced an “Arab Spring”. But it is undeniable that the present situation reflects a stopping and indeed an involution of the process and that we cannot understand the configuration that we see today without analyzing the failures of the revolutionary processes.

What solidarity?

We can see that our view of the situation cannot be reduced only to the American intervention. Moreover, contrary to neo- and post-Stalinist currents or movements such as Chavism in Latin America, our position has never been guided by the defence of one camp of states against another. Our point of starts from social interests and the defence of the rights of oppressed peoples. We have, from the beginning of the popular uprising in Syria, rejected any “campist” vision, which would have led us, in the name of the struggle against American imperialism, to support Bashar al-Assad, along with the Russians and the Iranians. We have from the beginning tried to work to build solidarity with the Syrian people against the dictatorship. We have thus refused to support demonstrations against only American imperialism, where we would only find a large number of supporters of Assad.

Our position must start from solidarity with the struggle of peoples and in particular the most oppressed peoples, those of Syria, Iraq, and Kurdistan, who are struggling against the Assad dictatorship and the armed bands of Daesh. In the present critical situation, it is even a matter of saving lives and human societies.

We denounce the imperialist intervention, because its objective is not to help the peoples, but to defend its own strategic, economic, political and military interests in the region. The American air strikes that have begun with military targets in sparsely populated areas are already beginning to take a toll on the population in some Syrian villages. Even more, the Syrian rebels and the PKK

forces denounce, in some areas, the lack of intervention to save the population. But beyond that, any foreign military intervention can only play into the hands of Daesh, which will present itself as the defender of the Sunni Arabs against the West. Therefore, no support for a foreign military intervention that cannot be separated from imperialist interests. But at the same time, we must reject unambiguously Daesh, the dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad and all the reactionary forces in the region.

Instead we must by all possible means show our solidarity with the peoples who are victims of barbarism. This should involve political, humanitarian, material and military aid to the progressive peoples and organizations which ask for it, which means today the democratic sectors of the Syrian rebellion and the Kurdish resistance. Our policy is to give the peoples of the region the means of having their own self-determination, which requires the rejection of any subordination to imperialism. This solidarity also involves a denunciation of racism and Islamophobia, here and now. It also rejects the "national union" that acts as a cover for the imperialist policies.

So, can we support progressive Syrian and Kurdish sectors who are asking our governments to help them? Our criterion is the preservation of human life and the rights of peoples. And in this case, there is no hesitation.

Trotsky, in a text entitled "Learn to think: a friendly suggestion for certain ultraleftists" indicated: *"Does the proletariat in peacetime reject and sabotage all actions and measures of the bourgeois government? Even during a strike which embraces an entire city, the workers take measures to insure the delivery of food to their own districts, make sure that they have water, that the hospitals do not suffer, etc. Such measures are dictated not by opportunism in relation to the bourgeoisie but by concern for the interests of the strike itself, by concern for the sympathy of the submerged city masses, etc. These elementary rules of proletarian strategy in peacetime retain full forces in time of war as well."* And further on: *"In ninety cases out of a hundred the workers actually place a minus sign where the bourgeoisie places a plus sign. In ten cases however they are forced to fix the same sign as the bourgeoisie but with their own seal, in which is expressed their mistrust of the bourgeoisie. The policy of the proletariat is not at all automatically derived from the policy of the bourgeoisie, bearing only the opposite sign (this would make every sectarian a master strategist."* (22May 1938)

This somewhat long quotation must lead us to make, every time, the concrete analysis of the concrete situation. Our "own seal" is to remember every time the responsibilities of imperialism, mistrust of its politics, the need for an independent politics of social movements and national liberation movements ... but in the present relationship of forces and faced with barbarism, there may be "ten cases out of a hundred" where there may be "the same sign" between the workers' movement, the solidarity movement and those who govern us.

But the main thing is to build an independent movement of solidarity that rejects both the imperialist military interventions and the barbarity of Daesh. It is to give all the means of self-determination to the peoples of the region, a task that a working-class and progressive movement worthy of the name should take on. The present situation of the European workers' movement makes such an activity difficult, but it is essential. We must, even against the current, and despite our weak forces act in such a perspective.

François Sabado, September 24, 2014

P.S.

* Translation International Viewpoint. <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org>