

The Algerian Presidential Elections

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Algeria and Egypt share much in common inherited from Boumedienne and Nasser's time. These two similar national popular projects of industrialisation and modernisation achieved important positive social progress, but were unable to move beyond their limits and thus opened the way to reversal.

Reactionary political Islam took advantage of the social disaster produced by the submission of post Boumedienne and post Nasser regimes to the neo liberal recipes. Yet in the two countries this sad false alternative was defeated, at least for the time being. Nevertheless there are major differences between the two countries which ought to be mentioned.

The Algerian pre-colonial society had been thoroughly disintegrated by the onslaught of the French colonisation; and the political power of its former aristocratic ruling class plainly removed. The result was that Algeria became a plebeian society whose citizens aspire to equality to an extent unknown elsewhere in the Arab countries. The Algerian liberation war further reinforced these exceptional aspirations. In this respect the historical travel of Algeria differs from other. In Egypt modernisation was constructed from the very beginning, in the time of Mohammad Ali Pacha, by the Egyptian ruling class which unwrapped into an aristocratic bourgeoisie, albeit accepting later its submission to the Imperial British and later US order.

In Algeria the "Islamic Salvation Front" revealed its criminal face throughout the civil war that it initiated by its own decision. It was defeated by the Army and the State with the support of the people. The Algerian State, under President Bouteflika, also defeated the project of establishing in the Western Sahara of a so called Islamic "State" (named "Sahelistan") at the expense of Algeria, Mali and Niger. This "emirate", on the pattern of the Gulf States, would have monopolised the oil, uranium and other mineral wealth and aligned on the US pattern of globalisation.

Chadli Benjedid who succeeded to Boumedienne had proceeded along the same extreme policies as those of Sadat and Mubarak : unlimited privatisations, personal involvement of top officers in the plunder of State property, dismantlement of the national control of oil, uncontrolled opening to transnationals, corruption. The Islamic Front intended to pursue these policies, but to the exclusive benefit of its "emirs", just like Morsi did.

But in Algeria after the civil war, with Bouteflika, these policies were partly corrected with steps taken to restore State control over the economy and in particular oil, including re-nationalisations, along with concessions to the democratic and social demands and the rights of the Amazighs far more actual than elsewhere in the Arab region.

Therefore no surprise that Algeria offers signs of a stronger capacity to resist imperialist global order than many other countries. The Algerian ruling class is certainly divided and ambiguous; but national aspiration is still alive among many of its leaders, in contrast with, for instance, Egypt, Morocco and Jordan, where the local bourgeoisie is entirely aligned and submitting to global imperialism. For all these reasons Algeria is a potential enemy that the West intends to destroy, if not through an Islamic regime (which was defeated), at least through the manipulation of the legitimate democratic demands, eventually the secession of the Sahara and the Kabyle region.

The election of Bouteflika is no surprise. In spite of his age and health, a majority supports his plan for recovery and certainly rejects a come-back of the Islamists. Moreover his election gives time to settle the internal conflicts among the ruling classes and avoid chaos. But the people voted with no enthusiasm; they expect more than what has been achieved.

The future of Algeria remains unsettled. A consolidation of an independent policy associated with social progress, which is the condition for its success, implies, as elsewhere in today's world, significant advances in the democratisation of the society. Whether this challenge is understood and taken up by the political forces both supporting the regime or fighting it remains uncertain.

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