

Two Years Later Uprisings Continue in Tunisia and Egypt: Neo-Colonialism and the Struggle for Genuine Democracy and National Unity

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On February 8 in Tunisia a general strike and mass demonstrations marked the response by the youth and workers to the assassination of opposition organizer Chokri Belaid. Over two years after the rebellions and strikes that initiated the upheavals throughout the region of North Africa and the Middle East, the struggle for political democracy and economic renewal is by no means resolved.

Chokri Belaid had been a staunch critic of the current ruling Ennahda Party, a moderate Islamist organization which won the largest bloc of votes during the national elections which were held in the aftermath of the overthrow of former President Zine Abidine Ben Ali, who fled the country on January 14, 2011 amid a national rebellion against a dictatorship designed to uphold the neo-colonial system of foreign dominance by France and the United States.

At the funeral of Belaid, the security forces used teargas to break up demonstrations in Tunis, the capital. Protests took place in other cities throughout the country coupled with a general strike led by the main workers' organization the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT) which was founded in January of 1946.

Demonstrations had been taking place since the assassination of Belaid on February 6. The nation was shocked by the murder, which many people have blamed on the operatives of the main Ennahda Party.

Various activists throughout the country have repeatedly stated that an atmosphere of political intolerance has taken hold in Tunisia. Belaid had been accused by the ruling Ennahda Party of fomenting unrest through his speeches which were highly critical of the government.

Belaid through his political critiques against the ruling party was held responsible for the discontent that is spreading throughout Tunisia in Gafsa, Kasserine, Siliana and in SidiBouزيد, where the uprising began on December 17, 2010 that spread throughout the country. In the evening before his assassination, he appeared on Nessma TV where he discussed state-sanctioned violence and political assassination.

Events in Tunisia Can Not Be Viewed Independently of Egypt and Other Regional Developments

Also in the North African state of Egypt, unrest has been resurfacing on a mass level since

the second anniversary of the January 25, 2011 uprising. In Egypt, simmering resentment over the rushed draft constitutional process during late 2012 remains where the secular and other opposition forces are enraged over the failure of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) government to live up to the ideals of the revolutionary struggle.

During 2011 in Egypt, the slogan “Freedom, Bread and Social Justice” rang out across the country of some 80 million people. Two years later, the same slogans have been raised again as dozens have been killed in Egypt since January 25, and the government of President Mohamed Morsi’s offers of national dialogue has been treated with profound skepticism.

The National Salvation Front (NSF), composed of a myriad of liberal, nationalist, socialist and anarchist organizations and political parties, has formed the opposition to the FJP government. The NSF is by no means a uniform coalition with some groups calling for the resignation or forced removal of the Muslim Brotherhood government of the FJP while others are demanding the formation of a coalition government and the repeal of the recently adopted constitution that was largely drawn up by the Islamist forces of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists, many of whom are represented by the Al Nour Party.

Demonstrations also took place on February 8 throughout Egypt as well. In Cairo, Alexandria, Port Said, the Delta cities as well as other regions of the country, people went into the streets raising slogans that seek the realization of genuine national liberation and social justice. Clashes between security forces and the demonstrators resulted in scores of injuries.

Although the demonstrations in many parts of the country began peacefully, the security forces provoked violence and consequently moved to clear the streets of protesters. Morsi claims that he is sincere about reconciling the interests of the FJP with those of the NSF. Nonetheless, he has at the same time ordered the security forces to take repressive measures against the masses.

In Egypt activists are also concerned about the rising tide of political assassination. The killing of many protesters in recent weeks has not been seriously addressed by the FJP government.

An Egyptian cleric issued a fatwa saying it was proper to assassinate opponents of the FJP government. Such proclamations cannot create a political atmosphere that is conducive for the reconciliation between the Islamists and the more secular coalitions and parties.

The various political parties and coalitions in both Egypt and Tunisia are reflective of a broader set of national and class dynamics in these respective states and throughout Africa and the Middle East. Both regions are still dominated by imperialism and absent of a struggle to break free of the strangleholds of the Pentagon, NATO, the transnational corporations and banks along with the refusal to directly confront the State of Israel, events cannot hope to bring about the alleviation of the suffering of the workers, farmers and youth.

Neo-Colonialism and the Struggle Against Imperialism

There can be no genuine revolutions in Egypt, Tunisia or any other state within Africa and the Middle East without a protracted fight against the West and its institutions which bolster

the State of Israel and other client regimes in regions. These individual states are largely the creation of European colonialism and modern day neo-colonialism headed by the U.S.

With this year being the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) it is instructive to examine where Africa has come since that fateful inaugural meeting in Ethiopia on May 25, 1963. The African Union(AU), the successor to the OAU, met recently at its headquarters in Addis Ababa.

This summit of the AU was taking place amid not only the renewed upsurge in mass demonstrations and repression in Egypt but also the French imperialist bombing and ground invasion of Mali and the spreading of the residual impact of this onslaught into both neighboring Algeria and Niger. The U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), the French military, Britain, Canada and other NATO states are involved in the war against Mali under the guise of fighting “Islamic terrorism.”

Despite these momentous political and military challenges which pose a direct threat to the national and regional security of Africa, very little was said of these developments in the official documents of the AU. With the formation of AFRICOM and its established relations with various African states and military units, the actual security situations of these governments have been further weakened.

In Mali, the AFRICOM structures trained, coordinated and directly supported monetarily the military within this West African state. Nonetheless, these actions on the part of the Pentagon objectively weakened the national security capacity of Mali to deal with an internal conflict in the north of the country.

The democratically-elected government of President AmadouToumaniToure was actually overthrown by a U.S.-trained officer Capt. AmadouSanogo. Even after the overthrow of President Toure, the Pentagon-trained junta never entered the battle against the Tuareg separatists or the Islamists who took over the north of the country.

In fact the destabilization of northern Mali was directly related to the U.S.-NATO war against the Jamahiriya in neighboring Libya under the leadership of the martyred Col. Muammar Gaddafi. The bombing of Libya and the training and deployment of thousands of rebel fighters into Libya created mass dislocations both internally and externally.

The destruction of Libya of course was never opposed by the so-called revolutionary groups inside Egypt and Tunisia. The failure to recognize within these political processes that the blanket bombing of a regional state is directly related to the revolutionary trajectory of all neighboring countries, is representative of a profound weakness in regard to political consciousness and strategic outlooks of the existing movements.

AFRICOM’s strategy on the continent is designed to develop relationships on a bi-lateral level. What is needed is for Africa and the Middle East to reject any involvement with AFRICOM on principle based upon the impact of the Pentagon’s interference in the internal affairs of African and Middle Eastern nations.

This same axiom is further reinforced by a cursory examination of the situation in Syria. Damascus is under direct threat by a U.S.-NATO-backed insurgency that is responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of Syrians.

Patriot missiles have been placed on the border between Turkey and Syria in an effort to further pressure the government of President Bashar al-Assad to relinquish power to the western-backed rebels and their political component. The existing division within the regional states over the situation in Syria is strengthening imperialism in its quest to conquer and dominate all states throughout the Middle East and Africa.

Consequently, as part of this process of encirclement and regime-change, the Israeli Defense Forces can carry out bombing operations against Syria. Israel can also erect a fence on the occupied territory of the Golan Heights as a means of increasing pressure aimed at the fall of the legitimate and internationally-recognized government of the Syrian state.

Nkrumah wrote in his book entitled, "Africa Must Unite," published at the founding of the OAU in 1963, that "A united Africa would be able to make a greater contribution towards the peace and progress of mankind (humanity). For one thing, it would resolve the problems of those arbitrary frontiers erected by the colonial powers, and so eliminate irredentist dissensions." (p. 202)

This same book goes on to point out that under a united anti-imperialist continent, and similar Middle East, "There would be no foreign military bases on African soil. With a united foreign policy and a common defense plan, there would be no need for them. In the concourse of African union, no African country would be left in a position of solitary weakness in which it could be bullied into allowing them." (p. 202)

Nkrumah continues noting that "Any kind of military pacts or alliances with outside powers would be unnecessary. Our united strength would be sufficient to deter any would-be aggressor, since an attack on any African country would be regarded as an attack on the Union." (p. 203)

With specific reference to Paris in the early 1960s, Nkrumah says "I do not imagine that France would have dared to attack Bizerta if we had been united. Nor would she explode atomic bombs in the Sahara in spite of urgent and repeated African objections." (p. 203)

Therefore, the lack of a regional Pan-African outlook will only further subject the continent to imperialist intervention and destabilization. The current struggles in Egypt and Tunisia must take these historical lessons into consideration in order to enhance the capacity of the masses to achieve the objectives that will create the conditions for genuine political and economic independence.

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