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An Analysis of Events in Syria (2011)

I studied 3 years, from 2002 till 2005, international relations and modern history of the Middle East in Cairo, Egypt. In the years following that period I travelled extensively through the Middle East and Northern Africa, the MENA-region, and as such I am able to make a comparison between Syria, which I visited 4 times, and other countries in the MENA-region.

When we focus on the situation in Egypt and Syria, we can see a huge difference between these two countries. The difference explained following is not just a difference between two countries but also serves as model to explain and understand the difference between two systems originating from a totally different ideological viewpoint.

Essential in understanding and analysing the situation is the factor of poverty and social injustice. During my 3 years in Cairo and visits to many MENA-countries I observed extreme poverty among a very large proportion of the population. Wealth in Egypt, although clearly present, was and still is largely concentrated in the hands of a very small and powerful elite. A political elite which in the same time is also the economical elite as the distinction between these two elites has totally blurred resulting in the political and economical power being in the hands of the same small elite. Aside from this powerful elite, the majority of the Egyptian people live in severe and even extreme poverty. 40 (forty!) percent of the Egyptian population lives under the poverty line as defined by the United Nations, meaning they have to live on less than 2 USD a day.

When we look into the Syrian situation, we see a totally different social environment. Syria has always avoided sharp social inequality and poverty by putting in place a whole set of mechanisms and tools to assure that generated wealth is distributed in a righteous way, providing opportunities to every citizen willing to work, develop himself and contribute to society. Examples of this mechanisms are the availability of high quality and almost free health care, education and housing facilities, coupled with progressive and social labor laws based on solidarity and justice. Syrian society has been build from the beginning on principles of solidarity, not exploitation as we witness in other countries in the same region. Syria has achieved all this without being in the comfortable position of possessing huge natural resources, oil and gas,

contrary to the Gulf countries. Syria has achieved everything by hard work and persistence, also in times of difficulty.

When we talk about solidarity between Syrians, we should always remember that Syrian society has never been built upon fractional lines, be it religious or other. Someone's background has never been an issue affecting participation in daily life. For example, the fact of someone coming from a Muslim or Christian family or if someone has, let's say, Palestinian roots is not an issue in Syrian society. People from all walks of life are freely mixing and supporting each other. On the contrary, stressing one's background or explicitly asking after it is deemed inappropriate in Syrian society and even considered a taboo. In this context, we have to realise that the many Palestinian citizens living in Syria have always enjoyed full citizenship rights with everything connected to it (access to healthcare, education, passports and other identity documents, ...) as they are considered 100% Syrian nationals. This contrasts strongly with the situation of the Palestinian communities in many other Arab countries.

Syrian society is based on a culture of mutual respect. Not on a culture of division, fanaticism or hatred whereby one population group is considered superior to another one as we witness, for example, in Saudi Arabia with the implementation of an extremely strict and intolerant Wahhabi ideology.

When we understand the way Syrian society functions, it becomes crystal clear that what is happening now, what we are witnessing today in Syria, has no internal causes but is fully linked to external manipulations and sabotage with the sole purpose to damage or even destroy Syria as a punishment for its policies of resistance, pan-Arab solidarity and anti-imperialism.

Let's get a little bit deeper into this. Since the Syrian revolution of 1963, when the Ba'th Party came to power, and especially since the Corrective Movement led by the late President Hafez al-Assad, Syria has always followed the path of pan-Arab solidarity. Examples of this are multiple. Syria has always supported the Palestinian cause, fully integrated the Palestinian people in Syrian society and struggled against Zionist aggression of which Syria is a victim itself (the Golan lands are occupied by Israel since 1967).

Syria has by all means supported Lebanon during the Lebanese civil war (1975 - 1990).

Syria morally supported Iran when the young Islamic Republic was attacked by the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussain just a few months after its foundation, in 1979, a war which would last 8 years (1980 - 1988). This position was certainly not obvious and demonstrated a lot of courage as Syria, just as Iraq, is an Arab country and was heavi-

ly criticised by most other Arab countries, especially the Gulf countries, for its stances.

Syria also condemned in the most strongest way the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (August 1990) and actively contributed to the liberation of Kuwait but in the same time also condemned and predicted the catastrophic consequences of the U.S. led invasion of Iraq of March 2003. Following this invasion, Syria absorbed the majority of Iraqi refugees and provided about 1.5 million of them with safety and facilities as healthcare and education. Once again we should stress here that Syria is not a rich country blessed with huge amounts of natural resources.

Syrian policy has always been to be a bulwark against Western interference in Arab affairs. Syria's position has always been that Arab lands belong to the Arabs, Arab resources belong to the Arabs and Arab internal conflicts should be resolved in a brotherly manner by the Arabs themselves. I refer here, as an example, to the non-interference of Syria in the conflict between Hamas and Fatah by not taking sides in this conflict but providing both sides with facilities and assistance to find and reach a reconciliation by themselves. These policies and principles of pan-Arab solidarity, resistance and anti-imperialism, sustained by Syria during decades, have caused feelings of frustration and revenge by some Western super powers and their regional allies towards Syria. In the eyes of these super powers, Syria should be punished or even, if possible, destroyed. We should keep in mind that when mentioning "regional allies", we point towards certain puppet regimes whose policies are not at all supported by their own populations. A clear example of this is the friendly, even submissive, stance of the fallen Mubarak regime with regard to Israel, a stance despised and condemned by the Egyptian people.

I am convinced that the day Syria gives up its steadfast principles of the right to self-determination for the Arabs, and promises to bow to external pressure, the aggression against Syria and the Syrian people will almost immediately be lifted.

Further evidence that what is taking place in Syria nowadays is the result of external schemes and manoeuvres can be observed by following the international media arena, referring hereby to international and national satellite channels as al-Jazeera, BBC World, CNN, al-Arabiya, etc... who are utilising all possible means and technics to fabricate false and disturbing stories and visual materials as to instigate the people and to bring a picture about Syria to the outside world which is totally in contradiction to reality and, by doing so, misleading the general public outside Syria, especially in Europe and the United States. Numerous examples of how these media organisations manipulate the truth by using pictures and other materials which have been shot in Tunisia, Libya or Egypt and introduce them in the Syrian context, after altering them with photoshop or other montage technics, are well known.

This disinformation campaign sharply highlights the existing double standards put in place when dealing with Syria. Where was Europe, the United States or the U.N. Security Council when Israel bombarded and destroyed the Lebanese infrastructure in 2006? Or when Israel bombarded and killed 1.500 and wounded more than 5.000 civilians during the Gaza war of December 2008 and January 2009? Where was the rest of the world and their same media organisations during the last 60 years of Zionist aggression against the Palestinians or it's Arab neighbours? Why don't we hear almost nothing about the atrocities committed nowadays in the small Gulf Kingdom of Bahrain, home to the U.S. 5th fleet? Why don't we know about Saudi and other Gulf country military units, "invited" by the ruling clan, to invade the Kingdom and suppress in the most brutal way, in cooperation with the national army and with full knowledge and support of the Western states, the Bahraini population?

To return to the Syrian situation. Does this all mean that there are no legitimate demands to be made? Does this mean that all people asking for reforms are violent criminals? The answer is of course not. Some demands are just and right. But the process of reforms, political and economical, started already more than ten years ago. No one can deny this. And the process is still going on in high gear. The Syrian government has taken far reaching measures to modernise the economy and to adapt it to a changed world order. But reform and transforming civil society and the economy takes time. Resolving problems as unemployment is a complicated process. Not only in Syria but also in the rest of the World. Also in Europe and the U.S.A unemployment figures remain high. No one can change this in a matter of weeks or months. Real reforms need years of implementing new mechanisms and continuously evaluating and adjusting them over time.

The democratisation process in Syria went ahead with big leaps resulting in a vibrant domestic media landscape, openness and civil rights. Syria has a multiparty political system with the dominant role of the socialist Ba'th Party on the people's daily life strongly limited. Even the state of emergency, put in place a long time ago, has now been lifted. But reform and adventurism are two different things. Reforming a solid and proven course is something else as steering the country in an anarchic and chaotic, even violent course characterised by lawlessness and civil disrespect.

With all these economical and political reforms being implemented, what else do the Syrian people genuinely want, besides continuing on the same path of stability where cautiously crafted reforms benefit all? The Syrian people want to continue their daily life and contribute to the development of their country and, by doing so, building a prosperous future for this and future generations.

The Syrian people have nothing to do and don't want to have anything to do with this small number of criminal gangs and thugs, paid with big money by foreign elements and governments, and provided with plenty of weapons and high tech utilities as satellite phones, to incite violence and terrorise the population with the ultimate goal of destroying the country and all the principles and values for which Syria stands. There are, unfortunately, a lot of governments, far away and nearby, who want to see Syria destroyed.

But ending with a positive note. I am sure that the Syrian people will overcome these disturbing times. Syria has been in difficult and challenging times before and has each time overcome its difficulties. One of the ingredients of its success has always been the solidarity between the Syrian people, especially in times of hardship and difficulties. The criminals and villains who are now leaving a trail of destruction behind will be brought to justice and held accountable by the Syrian people for their crimes and atrocities.

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