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The Protest Movement in Egypt: "Dictators" do not Dictate, They Obey Orders

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The Mubarak regime could collapse in the face of a nationwide protest movement... What prospects for Egypt and the Arab World?

"Dictators" do not dictate, they obey orders. This is true in Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria.

Dictators are invariably political puppets. Dictators do not decide.

President Hosni Mubarak was a faithful servant of Western economic interests and so was Ben Ali.

The national government is the object of the protest movement.

The objective is to unseat the puppet rather than the puppet-master.

The slogans in Egypt are "*Down with Mubarak, Down with the Regime*".

No anti-American posters have been reported... The overriding and destructive influence of the USA in Egypt and throughout the Middle East remains unheralded.

The foreign powers which operate behind the scenes are shielded from the protest movement.

No significant political change will occur unless the issue of foreign interference is meaningfully addressed by the protest movement.

The US embassy in Cairo is an important political entity, invariably overshadowing the national government. The Embassy is not a target of the protest movement.

<http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L174xH200/images-33-16d54.jpg>

In Egypt, a devastating IMF program was imposed in 1991 at the height of the Gulf War. It was negotiated in exchange for the annulment of Egypt's multibillion dollar military debt to the US as well as its participation in the war. The resulting deregulation of food prices, sweeping privatisation and massive austerity measures led to the impoverishment of the Egyptian population and the destabilization of its economy. The Mubarak government was praised as a model "IMF pupil".

The role of Ben Ali's government in Tunisia was to enforce the IMF's deadly economic medicine, which over a period of more than twenty years served to destabilize the national economy and impoverish the Tunisian population. Over the last 23 years, economic and social policy in Tunisia has been dictated by the Washington Consensus.

Both Hosni Mubarak and Ben Ali stayed in power because their governments obeyed and effectively enforced the dictates of the IMF.

From Pinochet and Videla to Baby Doc, Ben Ali and Mubarak, dictators have been installed by Washington. Historically in Latin America, dictators were instated through a series of US sponsored military coups. In today's World, they are installed through "free and fair elections" under the surveillance of the "international community".

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Our message to the protest movement:

Actual decisions are taken in Washington DC, at the US State Department, at the Pentagon, at Langley, headquarters of the CIA. at H Street NW, the headquarters of the World Bank and the IMF.

The relationship of "the dictator" to foreign interests must be addressed. Unseat the political puppets but do not forget to target the "real dictators".

The protest movement should focus on the real seat of political authority; it should target the US embassy, the delegation of the European Union, the national missions of the IMF and the World Bank.

Meaningful political change can only be ensured if the neoliberal economic policy agenda is thrown out.

Regime Replacement

If the protest movement fails to address the role of foreign powers including pressures exerted by "investors", external creditors and international financial institutions, the objective of national sovereignty will not be achieved. In which case, what will occur is a narrow process of "regime replacement", which ensures political continuity.

"Dictators" are seated and unseated. When they are politically discredited and no longer serve the interests of their US sponsors, they are replaced by a new leader, often recruited from within the ranks of the political opposition.

In Tunisia, the Obama administration has already positioned itself. It intends to play a key role in the "democratization program" (i.e. the holding of so-called fair elections). It also intends to use the political crisis as a means to weaken the role of France and consolidate its position in North Africa:

"The United States, which was quick to size up the groundswell of protest on the streets of Tunisia, is trying to press its advantage to push for democratic reforms in the country and further afield.

The top-ranking US envoy for the Middle East, Jeffrey Feltman, was the first foreign official to arrive in the country after president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was ousted on January 14 and swiftly called for reforms. He said on Tuesday only free and fair elections would strengthen and give credibility to the north African state's embattled leadership.

"I certainly expect that we'll be using the Tunisian example" in talks with other Arab governments, Assistant Secretary of State Feltman added.

He was dispatched to the north African country to offer US help in the turbulent transition of power, and **met with Tunisian ministers and civil society figures.**

Feltman travels to Paris on Wednesday to discuss the crisis with French leaders, boosting the impression that **the US is leading international support for a new Tunisia, to the detriment of its former colonial power, France. ...**

Western nations had long supported Tunisia's ousted leadership, seeing it as a bulwark against Islamic militants in the north Africa region.

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In 2006, the then US defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld, speaking in Tunis, praised the country's evolution.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton nimbly stepped in with a speech in Doha on January 13 warning Arab leaders to allow their citizens greater freedoms or risk extremists exploiting the situation.

"There is no doubt that the United States is trying to position itself very quickly on the good side,..." " AFP: US helping shape outcome of Tunisian uprising emphasis added

Will Washington be successful in instating a new puppet regime?

This very much depends on the ability of the protest movement to address the insidious role of the US in the country's internal affairs.

The overriding powers of empire are not mentioned. In a bitter irony, president Obama has expressed his support for the protest movement.

Many people within the protest movement are led to believe that president Obama is committed to democracy and human rights, and is supportive of the opposition's resolve to unseat a dictator, which was installed by the US in the first place.

Cooptation of Opposition Leaders

The cooptation of the leaders of major opposition parties and civil society organizations in anticipation of the collapse of an authoritarian puppet government is part of Washington's design, applied in different regions of the World.

The process of cooptation is implemented and financed by US based foundations including the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and Freedom House (FH). Both FH and the NED have links to the US Congress, the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), and the US business establishment. Both the NED and FH are known to have ties to the CIA.

The NED is actively involved in Tunisia, Egypt and Algeria. Freedom House supports several civil society organizations in Egypt.

"The NED was established by the Reagan administration after the CIA's role in covertly funding efforts to overthrow foreign governments was brought to light, leading to the discrediting of the parties, movements, journals, books, newspapers and individuals that received CIA funding. ... As a bipartisan endowment, with participation from the two major parties, as well as the AFL-CIO and US Chamber of Commerce, the NED took over the financing of foreign overthrow movements, but overtly and under the rubric of "democracy promotion." (Stephen Gowans, January « 2011 "What's left"

While the US has supported the Mubarak government for the last thirty years, US foundations with ties to the US State department and the Pentagon have actively supported the political opposition including the civil society movement. According to Freedom House: "Egyptian civil society is both vibrant and constrained. There are hundreds of non-governmental organizations devoted to expanding civil and political rights in the country, operating in a highly regulated environment." (Freedom House Press Releases).

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In a bitter irony, Washington supports the Mubarak dictatorship, including its atrocities, while also backing and financing its detractors, through the activities of FH, the NED, among others.

Under the auspices of Freedom House, Egyptian dissidents and opponents of Hosni Mubarak were received in May 2008 by Condoleezza Rice at the State Department and the US Congress. They also met White House National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley, who was "the principal White House foreign policy adviser" during George W. Bush's second term.

Freedom House's effort to empower a new generation of advocates has yielded tangible results and the New Generation program in Egypt has gained prominence both locally and internationally. Egyptian **visiting fellows from all civil society groups received [May 2008] unprecedented attention and recognition, including meetings in Washington with US Secretary of State, the National Security Advisor, and prominent members of Congress. In the words of Condoleezza Rice, the fellows represent the "hope for the future of Egypt."**

Freedom House, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=66&program=84> (emphasis added).

Political Double Talk: Chatting with "Dictators", Mingling with "Dissidents"

The Egyptian pro-democracy delegation to the State Department was described by Condoleezza Rice as "The Hope for the Future of Egypt".

In May 2009, Hillary Clinton met a delegation of Egyptian dissidents, several of which had met Condoleezza Rice a year earlier. These high level meetings were held a week prior to Obama's visit to Egypt:

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton praised the work of a group of Egyptian civil society activists she met with today and said it was in Egypt's interest to move toward democracy and to exhibit more respect for human rights.

The 16 activists met with Clinton and Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Jeffrey Feltman in Washington at the end of a two-month fellowship organized by Freedom House's New Generation program.

The fellows raised concern about what they perceived as the United States government distancing itself from Egyptian civil society and **called on President Obama to meet with young independent civil society activists when he visits Cairo next week. They also urged the Obama administration to continue to provide political and financial support to Egyptian civil society** and to help open the space for nongovernmental organizations which is tightly restricted under Egypt's longstanding emergency law.

The fellows told Clinton that momentum was already building in Egypt for increased civil and human rights and that U.S. support at this time was urgently needed. They stressed that civil society represents a moderate and peaceful "third way" in Egypt, an alternative to authoritarian elements in the government and those that espouse theocratic rule. (Freedom House, May 2009)

During their fellowship, the activists spent a week in Washington **receiving training in advocacy and getting an inside look at the way U.S. democracy works.** After their training, the fellows were matched with civil society organizations throughout the country where they shared experiences with U.S. counterparts. **The activists will wrap up their program ... by visiting U.S. government officials, members of Congress, media outlets and think tanks.**" (Freedom House, May 2009, emphasis added)

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These opposition civil society groups "which are currently playing an important role in the protest movement" are supported and funded by the US. They indelibly serve US interests.

The invitation of Egyptian dissidents to the State Department and the US Congress also purports to instil a feeling of commitment and allegiance to American democratic values. America is presented as a model of Freedom and Justice. Obama is upheld as a "Role Model".

http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/IMG/jpg/Egyptian_dissidents_fellows_of_Freedom_House_in_Washington_DC_2008.jpg

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton speaks with "Egyptian activists promoting freedom and democracy", prior to meetings at the State Department in Washington, DC, May 28, 2009.

http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L400xH244/bush_Freedom_House-98fc7.jpg
<http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L400xH266/Mubarak-0155-05dcc.jpg>

The Puppet Masters Support the Protest Movement against their own Puppets

The puppet masters support dissent against their own puppets?

Its called "political leveraging", "manufacturing dissent". Support the dictator as well as the opponents of the dictator as a means of controlling the political opposition.

These actions on the part of Freedom House and the National Endowment for Democracy, on behalf of the Bush and Obama administrations, ensure that the US funded civil society opposition will not direct their energies against the puppet masters behind the Mubarak regime, namely the US government.

These US funded civil society organizations act as a "Trojan Horse" which becomes embedded within the protest movement. They protect the interests of the puppet masters. They ensure that the grassroots protest movement will not address the broader issue of foreign interference in the affairs of sovereign states.

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The Facebook Twitter Bloggers Supported and Financed by Washington

In relation to the protest movement in Egypt, several civil society groups funded by US based foundations have led the protest on Twitter and Facebook:

"Activists from Egypt's Kifaya (Enough) movement - a coalition of government opponents - and the 6th of April Youth Movement organized the protests on the Facebook and Twitter social networking websites. Western news reports said Twitter appeared to be blocked in Egypt later Tuesday." (See Voice of America, Egypt Rocked by Deadly Anti-Government Protests)

<http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L180xH179/Unknown-2-ca00a.jpg>

Reads; Kifaya (Enough)

The Kifaya movement, which organized one of the first protests directed against the Mubarak regime in late 2004, is supported by the US based International Center for Non-Violent Conflict . Kifaya is a broad-based movement which

has also taken a stance on Palestine and US interventionism in the region.

In turn, Freedom House has been involved in promoting and training the Middle East North Africa Facebook and Twitter blogs:

Freedom House fellows acquired skills in civic mobilization, leadership, and strategic planning, and **benefit from networking opportunities through interaction with Washington-based donors, international organizations and the media. After returning to Egypt, the fellows received small grants to implement innovative initiatives such as advocating for political reform through Facebook and SMS messaging.**

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=66&program=84> (emphasis added)

From February 27 to March 13 [2010], Freedom House hosted 11 bloggers from the Middle East and North Africa [from different civil society organizations] for a two-week Advanced New Media Study Tour in Washington, D.C. The Study Tour provided the bloggers with training in digital security, digital video making, message development and digital mapping. **While in D.C., the Fellows also participated in a Senate briefing, and met with high-level officials at USAID, State [Department] and Congress as well as international media including Al-Jazeera and the Washington Post.**<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=115&program=84&item=87> emphasis added

One can easily apprehend the importance attached by the US administration to this bloggers' "training program", which is coupled with high level meetings at the US Senate, the Congress, the State Department, etc.

The role of the Facebook Twitter social media as an expression of dissent, must be carefully evaluated in the light of the links of several Egyptian civil society organizations to Freedom House (FH), the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the US State Department.

BBC News World (broadcast in the Middle East) quoting Egyptian internet messages has reported that "the US has been sending money to pro-democracy groups." (BBC News World, January 29, 2010). According to a report in The Daily Telegraph, quoting a secret US embassy document (Jan 29, 2011):

"The protests in Egypt are being driven by the April 6 youth movement, a group on Facebook that has attracted mainly young and educated members opposed to Mr Mubarak. **The group has about 70,000 members and uses social networking sites to orchestrate protests** and report on their activities.

The documents released by WikiLeaks reveal **US Embassy officials [in Cairo] were in regular contact with the activist throughout 2008 and 2009**, considering him one of their most reliable sources for information about human rights abuses." (emphasis added)

The Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt constitutes the largest segment of the opposition to president Mubarak. According to reports, The Muslim Brotherhood dominates the protest movement.

While there is a constitutional ban against religious political parties Brotherhood members elected to Egypt's parliament as "independents" constitute the largest parliamentary block.

The Brotherhood, however, does not constitute a direct threat to Washington's economic and strategic interests in the region. Western intelligence agencies have a longstanding history of collaboration with the Brotherhood. Britain's support of the Brotherhood instrumented through the British Secret Service dates back to the 1940s. Starting in the 1950s, according to former intelligence official William Baer, "The CIA [funnelled] support to the Muslim Brotherhood because of "the Brotherhood's commendable capability to overthrow Nasser."1954-1970: CIA and the Muslim Brotherhood Ally to Oppose Egyptian President Nasser, These covert links to the CIA were maintained in the post-Nasser era.

Concluding Remarks

The removal of Hosni Mubarak has, for several years, been on the drawing board of US foreign policy.

Regime replacement serves to ensure continuity, while providing the illusion that meaningful political change has occurred.

Washington's agenda for Egypt has been to "hijack the protest movement" and replace president Hosni Mubarak with a new compliant puppet head of state. Washington's objective is to sustain the interests of foreign powers, to uphold the neoliberal economic agenda which has served to impoverish the Egyptian population.

From Washington's standpoint, regime replacement no longer requires the installation of an authoritarian military regime as in the heyday of US imperialism, It can be implemented by co-opting political parties, including the Left, financing civil society groups, infiltrating the protest movement and manipulating national elections.

With reference to the protest movement in Egypt, President Obama stated in a January 28 video broadcast on Youtube: "The Government Should Not Resort to Violence". The more fundamental question is what is the source of that violence? Egypt is the largest recipient of US military aid after Israel. The Egyptian military is considered to be the power base of the Mubarak regime:

"The country's army and police forces are geared to the teeth thanks to more than \$1 billion in military aid a year from Washington. ... When the US officially describes Egypt as "an important ally" it is inadvertently referring to Mubarak's role as a garrison outpost for US military operations and dirty war tactics in the Middle East and beyond. There is clear evidence from international human rights groups that countless "suspects" rendered by US forces in their various territories of (criminal) operations are secretly dumped in Egypt for "deep interrogation". The country serves as a giant "Guantanamo" of the Middle East, conveniently obscured from US public interest and relieved of legal niceties over human rights." (Finian Cunningham, Egypt: US-Backed Repression is Insight for American Public, Global Research, January 28, 2010).

America is no "Role Model" of Democratization for the Middle East. US military presence imposed on Egypt and the Arab World for more than 20 years, coupled with "free market" reforms are the root cause of State violence.

America's intent is to use the protest movement to install a new regime.

The People's Movement should redirect its energies: Identify the relationship between America and "the dictator". Unseat America's political puppet but do not forget to target the "real dictators".

Shunt the process of regime change.

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Dismantle the neoliberal reforms.

Close down US military bases in the Arab World.

Establish a truly sovereign government.

Post-scriptum :

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