

Damascus, Oakland and Further On...

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Global Research, October 27, 2011

[Voice of Russia](#) 27 October 2011

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#)

“If occupy Oakland was in Damascus, U.S. State department would be telling Wolf Blitzer (a famous CNN journalist and TV show host. – BV) how unacceptable it was to teargas peaceful marchers,” The Huffington Post writes citing a Twitter blogger.

In fact, what started as a marginal event and a kind of theatrical performance staged by a few dozen activists in New York some six weeks ago, has now grown into a global phenomenon no one can put a blind eye to. Protesters are marching in all major U.S. cities and all over Western Europe. Politicians are making conflicting remarks on the “Occupy” movement. Still, the exact goals of the protesters and a possible outcome of the protests remain unclear.

It is clear what they are against – the corporate greed, the unevenness of the public wealth’s distribution, the corrupt legal authorities and governing structures that have proved their complete impotence in the face of the crisis that erupted in 2008, but is far from being over yet.

It is even less clear what reaction is to be expected from local authorities confronting a phenomenon unheard of in major Western nations since 1968. The recent events in Oakland, where the police used tear gas to disperse the demonstrators, show that the U.S. authorities are not too different in their methods than the much condemned rulers of Syria. Some blame what happened in Oakland on the Mayor Jean Quan, stating that was just an excess of zeal. But while the protests are gain momentum, many more U.S. mayors might be ready to follow Ms. Quan’s example. At least, according to “Occupy Arrests” Twitter feed, there have already been more than 2,500 arrests world-wide, associated with the Occupy movement. How many are to follow?

The funny thing (if anything can be funny about the use of teargas) is that several weeks ago Jean Quan herself marched with the protesters – in line with the Democratic Party policies to position the Occupy movement as a left-wing counter-balance to the Tea Party on the right. But despite the deep political distinction between the two, one thing they do have in common – that is, a complete distrust in the existing governing system.

The mistrust in the government is clearly demonstrated by all the latest polls. President Barack Obama enjoys the low rating of 46 percent. A slight consolation for him might be that the Congress is even less trusted – with only about 9 percent approval.

This trend is developing against the growing popularity of the “occupy” movement. The latest CBS News/New York Times poll shows that 43 percent of Americans agree with the views of the movement.

As usually happens at crisis times, too many people and institutions seek to use the growing popularity of a public phenomenon they have never been associated with. For example, a married couple in Long Island has filed an application with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office to register a trade mark "Occupy Wall Street", seeing a potential of it becoming a global trend.

This only reminds of one the early 2000s, when Osama bin Laden's portrait was printed on thousands of T-shirts in countries like Pakistan.

Osama bin Laden remained the most dreaded terrorist despite the fact that his face was looking out from T-shirts. Likewise, the "Occupy" movement still remains a growing trend and a growing threat to the establishment, while the establishment itself seems not to know how to handle it.

In the end, the only type of measures the U.S. establishment seems to resort to, is teargas. But then, who can tell in what way Oakland is different from Damascus? And won't this become a habitual practice for the governments of the "civilized" world to handle whatever challenges they may face in future?

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