

Dictatorship and Neo-Liberalism: The Tunisian People's Uprising

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December 2010 saw the beginning of a milestone in the Arab World. Protests in Tunisia started because of a lack of freedom, inflation, unemployment, and a decline in wages. They could lead to a new model in the Arab World.

The imposed leaders of the Arab World have taken notice of the Tunisian people's uprising, which hereto is not a full revolution.

The popular uprising in Tunisia has sent cold shivers up the spines of Arab rulers and made them fear for the continuation of their own unpopular reigns. Remnants of the old regime are also working to incorporate themselves into the formation of a new government.



An Arab Uprising Against the Hand-in-Hand Couple of Dictatorship and Neo-Liberalism

The Tunisian people's uprising is in part an answer against the vicious police state in Tunisia run by the dictator Zine Al-Abidine Bin Ali. In part, the Tunisian uprising is also an

answer to the hideous neo-liberal model of economic development that was imposed by Bin Ali in Tunisia. In this regard, the U.S. and the E.U. were the primary benefactors of the harsh economic measures imposed in Tunisia by Bin Ali.

Up until 2011, Tunisia has consistently been paraded and touted as an ideal state and as a model of success and development by the U.S., the E.U., the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, amongst others. Never once have the human right violations, the murders, and the repression in Tunisia been criticized by any of these bodies or their officials.

Up until after Bin Ali fled (January 14, 2010), the mainstream media in North America, Western Europe, Australia, and the Arab World have mentioned nothing about the brutal repression in Tunisia. Inversely, the mainstream media has white-washed most of the Bin Ali regime's crimes and instead talked about Tunisia as a success story. *The Guardian*, after Bin Ali ran away to Saudi Arabia from Tunisia, gave an overview of the type of repression Bin Ali directed against Tunisians:

Confusion reigned. For the first time in the Arab world, a people had forced out a leader by spontaneously and peacefully taking to the street. But although Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali has fled, the diehards of his brutal police force have not. During the day random yellow taxi-loads of militia loyal to the ousted leader had careered through the capital and some suburbs, firing randomly into the air. Armed gangs broke into homes and ransacked them, or fired shots in the street.

In the early morning, after the curfew that shuts down Tunis at night, some residents ventured out for coffee at the few cafes that were open, often in the shadow of tanks positioned on intersections. Later, tension ran high. By lunchtime, one hospital morgue in Tunis had registered 13 dead, including five police officers. "This is being done by Ben Ali's old torturers, they have arms, they want to create chaos," said an activist from one opposition party.

In residential areas across the country, locals formed vigilante groups to defend themselves against the gangs they feared were led by Ben Ali's police. In La Marsa, a middle-class suburb to the north, streets were blockaded by old bits of broken doors, plant pots, water cans, bricks and paving slabs, to stop cars speeding through for drive-by shootings or houses being ransacked. Omar, 18, a well-dressed sixth-former who wanted to go to art college, had been standing guard until 3am as part of a hastily-formed group. "There were 30 of us, including my schoolfriends and my dad. We armed ourselves with sticks and whatever we could find, and wore white armbands so the army knew who we were." As he stood talking outside a smart shopping centre protected by a tank, a soldier warned him to move, as there had been reports of a taxi marauding through the area containing gunmen firing from its windows.

"We'll never forgive Ben Ali for unleashing his militia on the country," said one elderly lady. "More than the corruption of his regime, this is what we will never, ever forgive him for."

Meanwhile, the full horror of repression over four weeks of demonstrations is beginning to emerge. Human rights groups estimate at least 150-200 deaths since 17 December. In random roundups in poor, rural areas youths were shot in the head and dumped far from home so bodies could not be identified. Police also raped women in their houses in poor neighbourhoods in and around Kasserine in the rural interior.

Siham Bensedrine, head of the National Council for Civil Liberties, said: "These

were random, a sort of reprisal against the people. In poor areas, women who had nothing to do with anything, were raped in front of their families. Guns held back the men; the women were raped in front of them." A handful of cases were reported in Kasserine and Thala last Monday. Rape was often used as a torture technique under the regime; opposition women report they were raped in the basement of the interior ministry, as were men, too.

Rights lawyers were also gathering information on those murdered and dumped far from their villages, thrown into cemetery grounds, or offloaded at the side of the road or outside hospitals. These shootings were believed to have taken place in the past ten days. "Lots of these bodies are yet to be identified; they were purposely dumped far from their homes. Families think their young ones have been arrested. They don't know they are never coming back," said Bensedrine, who herself had been beaten and forced into exile before returning in recent days. You have to understand that under Ben Ali, it was a regime of torture, with beating, harassment and intimidation but not necessarily mass killing. The past four weeks has been different; it's a massacre, it's something else."

Ahlem Belhadj, a psychiatrist and women's rights activist, said people felt robbed of the joy of Ben Ali's departure by the chaos that had ensued. She said the spontaneous protest movement - and the unemployed undergraduate who started it by setting himself alight - had showed the desperation of a population who felt repressed, humiliated, with no chance of jobs or prospects after 23 years of despotism.

"We had become a nation of hunger strikers; there was no other political or social means of dissent.

"Then, for people to set themselves alight, was extreme: it showed there was such a fear of the 'other', the regime, that people could only turn the aggression on themselves. It was self-destruction as a way of fighting."

Khelil Ezzaouia, an orthopaedic surgeon and trade union figure tipped for a post in the interim government, hoped the chaos would be brought under control, and that commissions set up into rights abuses, political reform and corruption. He said: "There will be a temporary transition government to show the page of Ben Ali has been closed, and to send out a strong signal to reassure the population."

On national state radio, a tool of regime power until days ago, DJs spoke freely for the first time, but had to regret that the joy of a dictator's departure had been tempered by a fear of the militia attacks.

"Ours is a difficult happiness," sighed one music show presenter, before putting on another 1960s resistance song. [1]

Why the Silence from the U.S., France, the E.U., and the Arab Dictators?

While the U.S. and its allies were also quick to label and tout the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, the Rose Revolution in Georgia, the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan, the Twitter Revolution in Moldova, and the Green Revolution in Iran, they did not do the same in regards to the protests of the Tunisian people.

When there was election turmoil in Venezuela and in Iran, the U.S. and the E.U. were quick to make declarations about democracy and to criticize Caracas and Tehran. Yet, the same standards were not applied in regards to the 2009 Tunisian elections and the protests that started in December 2010 in Tunisia.

The French, the U.S., the House of Saud, and Israel have all been instrumental in sustaining the Bin Ali dictatorship. Bin Ali in reality served the interests of the U.S. and its allies. American and French “advisors” would call the shots for Tunisia, especially in its financial, intelligence, security, and military fields. The U.S., France, and the E.U. also had no problems with the deeply rooted levels of corruption and nepotism in Tunisia under Bin Ali.

The American and French governments, as well as Israel, have been complicit in the repression of the Tunisian people and the repression of the Tunisian demands for freedom. This is why there is a groundswell of Tunisian anger towards the U.S., France, and Israel. Protests outside of the American and French embassies are a demonstration of the awareness of the Tunisian people about the U.S. and French role in oppressing their freedom.

The White House and the U.S. State Department only made statements to the benefit of Bin Ali. Hillary Clinton, the U.S. Secretary of State, told Al-Arabiya News Channel that the U.S. government was “not taking sides” in regards to Bin Ali and his brutal repression of unarmed civilian protesters demanding freedom. The U.S. merely waited until Bin Ali fled to even acknowledge the Tunisian people’s rights. Doing quite the opposite over the years, the U.S. government and its officials have continuously made statements of support for Bin Ali, as is customary of their support of any dictators who submit to U.S. economic interests.

The House of Saud, which controls a substantial amount of Arabic media through personal ownership or family ties, would use all its influence to discredit the Tunisian people’s protests in an effort to manipulate Arab public opinion in favour of the dictatorial regime of Bin Ali. Later, when it was clear that there was no hope for the continuation of Bin Ali’s rule, the House of Saud would invite the Tunisian dictator to Saudi Arabia.



The Old Colonial Master: Paris offers to help Bin Ali Crush the Tunisian People

Before it became obvious that the Bin Ali regime was going to collapse, France wanted to help crush the Tunisian people's demands for freedom. The French Defence Minister, Michèle Alliot-Marie, lied through her teeth about the offer days later.

The Guardian chronicles this:

The French foreign minister, Michèle Alliot-Marie, today defended her controversial offer to help Tunisia's deposed president restore order days before he was ousted.

Alliot-Marie had been summoned to explain her remarks, made last week, to the Assemblée Nationale's foreign affairs commission.

The cabinet minister had offered to share the expertise of French security forces “recognised throughout the world” to help control the uprising.

Since Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali fled Tunisia on Friday, France has attempted to distance itself from the former leader, refusing him exile and ordering a block on his family’s property and money held in France.

Today, Alliot-Marie fended off opposition calls for her resignation and told parliamentarians that France, along with other countries, had “not seen events coming”.

“Let’s face it, we were all of us – politicians, diplomats, researchers, journalists – taken by surprise by the jasmine revolution,” Alliot-Marie said.

She said her offer had been “misrepresented” and had been aimed at helping the Tunisian people, not propping up repression.

“I’d spent the night in an aeroplane, and it’s possible I did not express myself well,” she said. “I began to doubt myself, but afterwards I re-read my proposal to see that it was what actually what I thought and not what was being interpreted by certain people.”

She added that she was “scandalised” by how her comments had been distorted.

Earlier, it had appeared that Alliot-Marie was being isolated by the Élysée Palace after an adviser of the president, Nicolas Sarkozy, suggested she was expressing “her own analysis of the situation”. [2]

In reality, Paris did secretly send aid to Bin Ali. The U.S. and Israel also sent riot gear and arms.



The Mossad and Israel in Tunisia

In regards to the interests of Tel Aviv, Tunisia has been an open zone for Israeli intelligence work, killings, and data collection against Palestinian and Arab activists. Israel has helped in the repression of democratic dissent in Tunisia to keep Bin Ali in power. It has been a part of Israel’s strategic initiative to prevent any democratic states from emerging in the Arab

World. The same can be said about the U.S. and the E.U. in regards to preventing the emergence of real Arab democracy. The Tunisian uprising would actually force the Israeli government to make an “emergency rescue” of so-called Israeli “visitors” in Tunisia:

A group of 20 Israelis was rescued Saturday evening from Tunisia, where a violent uprising has succeeded in overturning the government.

The complicated mission was orchestrated by a number of Israeli authorities, including the Foreign Ministry. The tourists were first transferred to a third country, from where are to continue to Israel by plane. [3]

These so-called Israeli “visitors” that the Israeli government would evacuate from Tunisia were Mossad agents.

Tunisia still in the Cross-Hairs

The neo-liberal model has brought poverty and despair to Tunisia. These facts have been ignored by the U.S., France, and those that commended and lauded Tunisian economic measures. Once again, the U.S. and French governments have also exposed their contempt’s for genuine democracy. Any talk by Paris and the U.S. about respecting and caring for the Tunisian people is merely two-face bravado.

Calls for democracy and fair elections were only made by the U.S. and France after Bin Ali fled Tunisia. If there were any sincerity in the U.S. and French calls for Arab self-determination then they would extend these calls to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, Egypt, Libya, Jordon, and Yemen. Beyond the Arab World, they would extend these calls to countries like NATO-garrisoned Afghanistan.

The mainstream media is also just starting to pick up on the events in Tunisia, but with a narrow focus that ignores the work of Bin Ali and his cronies as economic hitmen for the E.U. and America. Despite the fact that it has no connection to WikiLeaks and the fact that it is not hereto a full-blown revolution, the revolt in Tunisia has also begun to be dubbed as a “WikiLeaks Revolution.”

Tunisia is not free yet. The Tunisian national unity government is dominated and includes many of the same characters from Bin Ali’s regime. The uprising has not turned into a revolution yet.

The U.S., France, the E.U., the House of Saud, the Arab dictators, and Israel are all conspiring to ensure that a new Tunisian government that will serve their interests will take the mantle of the old Tunisian regime. The structure that kept Bin Ali in place still exists and the foreign interests that supported his rule still hold influence in Tunis. They may manage to retain power.

America and France have not forfeited their economic interests in Tunisia. Nor has the neo-liberal model been declared null and void in Tunis. In a bid to maintain the continuation of French contracts in Tunisia, the French government did not offer to Bin Ali sanctuary in France, despite the fact that he was a loyal ally of Paris until the end of his reign.

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NOTES

[1] Angelique Chrisafis, "Confusion, fear and horror in Tunisia as old regime's militia carries on the fight," *The Guardian* (U.K.), January 16, 2011.

[2] Kim Willsher, "French minister defends offer of security forces to Tunisia," *The Guardian* (U.K.), January 18, 2011.

[3] Ronen Medzini, "20 Israelis rescued from Tunisia," *Yedioth Ahronoth*, January 15, 2011.

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