

Syria: Turning Back the Clock on the Arab Spring

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Whatever genuine grievances and demands for political reform the Syrian people might have had a year and half ago were trodden underfoot by this stampeding sectarian drive that the Syrian opposition itself worked so hard to foster among its own supporters.

Perhaps one of the most inglorious accomplishments of the western-backed/Gulf-funded Syrian opposition is that it has – and over the course of mere months – managed to inflict such a colossal, irreparable damage to the Syrian people’s future prospects of having a real, homegrown and genuine uprising to bring about positive change in their own country.

Thanks to the devious Syrian National Council and the crazed Free Syrian Army; the term ‘revolution’ has sadly lost its worth and lustre for a sizable portion of the Syrian populace and in the Arab world in general, as it has become marred by abhorrent stigmas of sectarianism, religious fanaticism, succumbing to foreign agendas, subjugation of national integrity and social disintegration. We must concede to the SNC, the FSA and their western patrons their unrivalled ability in transforming what was essentially a flicker of hope into an entire landscape of desolation and ruin.

In the blink of an eye, the home country in which all Syrians coexisted peacefully and harmoniously together for decades became a place they do not even recognize; reciprocal kidnappings between rival tribes, sects, ethnicities and neighbourhoods have become the order of the day; makeshift illegal checkpoints manned by pundits and warring militias have popped up all over Syrian cities; where ID cards could easily get unfortunate passersby killed on the spot, the country’s normally amicable population has been driven headfirst into a horrible cycle of killings and reprisal killings, torture and summary executions, and Mount Kassoun, a once picturesque and vibrant touristic site that overlooks Damascus has become a strategic vantagepoint for rocket launchers and artillery barrage.

Most of those dire consequences trace straight back to the Syrian National Council’s doorstep; by handing the fate of the Syrian uprising lock stock and barrel over to the unreliable hands of Hillary Clinton and her deep-pocketed coterie of Gulf despots; they have nearly completely nullified whatever credibility the rebellion might have enjoyed when it was born on the streets of Dera’a. It ceased to be a matter of local dissent against a brute dictatorship any more; it quickly morphed into this disastrous foreign-induced coup d’état – complete with mad covert and overt military operations and intelligence work.

Not only did the Syrian opposition manage to effectively kill the Syrian revolution in the womb by alienating vast sectors of the public from joining the uprising; but they have willingly chosen to systematically sectarianise Syrian society by sowing the seeds of intolerance and confessional discord. Right from the word go; the entire Alawite population

was criminalized outright and deemed guilty by “sectarian association” to president Bashar Al-Assad. Mass branding them as “Shabiha” (pro government guns-for-hire) was nothing more than a cheap albeit racist ploy to justify the prosecution of entire Alawite communities and soften the sting of any possible criticism that might arise in response to the FSA’s criminal practices against innocent civilians.

Al Jazeera (especially the more vulgar Arabic branch of the Qatari-funded news network) was – and still is – a major instrument in furthering this deadly stereotype; the channel that once championed (or so it seemed anyway) pan-Arab national causes such as the Palestinian struggle against the Israeli occupation and the Iraqi resistance to the Coalition invasion, is now openly and notoriously championing what amounts to prima facie ethnic cleansing of Alawites in Syria. This was glaringly evident in the channel’s knee-jerk attempts at justifying the latest mass murder of several members of the Berri family in Aleppo; insisting that the victims were plain-clothed paramilitary thugs “armed to the teeth” fighting alongside government forces prior to their capture and swift execution by the “good guys”. This multi million-dollar media mammoth has been reduced to nothing more than a mere sleazy PR office for the crooked Free Syrian Army.

Of course this blatant bigotry was not limited to the Alawites but extended to the Shiites as well. In a bizarre reshuffle of political cards; Syria has become a safe haven for a slew of CIA, MI6 and even Mossad operatives to roam in and out of rebel-held areas to their hearts’ content, but not for Lebanese Shiite families and Iranian civilians – who have become the target of a vicious witch-hunting spree as various gangs and factions of the Free Syrian Army compete for the honour of “hosting” (a callous euphemism for “kidnapping”, used by the kidnapers and repeated shamelessly by Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya news channels) and humiliating these people on live television.

Case in point; on May 22, 2012, a busload of Shiite pilgrims (including women) was intercepted at gunpoint by gangs of the FSA near Aleppo while they were returning home to Lebanon from a religious trip to Iran. Later, the women were released but till this very day the fate of the remaining 11 male hostages remains uncertain (despite a handful of badly choreographed, self-promotional televised theatrical appearances of the kidnapper on Lebanese channels).

The kicker is that the abductors haven’t even made up their minds yet on what their demands actually are and what will it take to free these hostages from captivity. First they demanded the Syrian regime to stop its military campaign against rebel-held areas in exchange for their release. Then they tried to clumsily use the hostages to extort an apology from Hezbollah’s chief Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah (apologize for what! I’m not sure; probably for the preposterous lie which the rebels themselves created and helped peddle in the media about Hezbollah’s alleged involvement in the Syrian government’s crackdown on protesters). Finally they changed their tune by announcing that the captives won’t be released till after the success of the revolution and the election of a new democratic parliament in Syria.

Of course the recent kidnapping of 48 Iranians in Damascus on August 4, 2012, falls also into this same sectarian bracket. It’s enough for the rebels to declare – and without a shred of evidence – that each and every one of the 48 hostages is a member of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard; and the mainstream media will immediately gobble up and echo the bigoted contortions of the kidnapers as “proven facts”, almost sight unseen.

This systematic deconstruction of the Syrian identity to make way for a new one where religious affiliations supersede nationalism has always been one of the main calling cards of the Muslim Brotherhood-led Syrian opposition. And like a moth to a flame, Saudi and Qatari-funded media went into overdrive, promoting and in effect feeding the cancerous growth of sectarian rhetoric within the ranks of the revolution's public base of support.

A quick look through any of the online forums, chat rooms and facebook pages dedicated for the support of the Syrian Revolution will reveal the extent to which the proponents of the opposition have been indoctrinated. Every Alawite has become an agent of Iran. Exterminating them is fair game (or worse... a religious duty). Hostile sentiments run rampant. Some of these pages actually advocate the kidnapping of Alawites and Shiites while others offer death threats or even "hit lists" containing the names of local religious clerks, journalists, personalities loyal to the regime or just ordinary Syrian citizens marked for death because they were caught showing support for Al-Assad on the government-affiliated TV channel, Addunia.

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A cursory review of the slogans the Syrian rebels have designated for each and every major Friday demonstration since the start of the revolution on March of 2011 (following a popular trend in the Arab Spring of giving certain titles to Fridays to mark a major day of mobilization and action) would be enough to reveal the chronic sectarian, divisive and sometimes separatist undertones that has plagued this uprising from the get go. Instead of emphasizing encompassing themes of national unity and accord that transcend religious and ethnic affiliations; Syrian "revolutionaries" opted for highlighting the divisive elements within Syrian society by selecting titles that directly spoke to the average Syrian's most basic ethnic and sectarian instincts. For example; on May 20, 2011 anti-government demonstrations across the country were dubbed "Azadi Friday" in a blatant effort to sway the country's Kurdish population into joining the uprising against president Bashar Al Assad (Azadi being the Kurdish word for Freedom). Ten months later, demonstrations on March 9, 2012 were also dubbed the "Friday of Loyalty to the Kurdish Uprising". But if democracy, human rights and political freedoms were in fact the main drivers for revolting against the regime, why would there be a need to single out a certain group of citizenry and incite a narrow sense of ethnic nationalism within this minority?

Other major themes amounted to handing out invitations for western powers to come and bomb the country; such as "the Friday of International Protection" (Sep. 9, 2011), "Friday of No-Fly Zones" (Oct. 28, 2011), "Friday of Freezing Syria's Arab League Membership" (Nov. 11, 2011), "Friday of the Syrian Buffer Zone" (Dec. 2, 2011) and of course the "Friday of Immediate Foreign Intervention" on March 16, 2012.

National red lines were crossed in the name of the revolution because of this pervading warped culture of self-induced impunity which ironically made the uprising all the more susceptible to all kinds of foreign manipulations. Now the whole situation in Syria is heavily skewed and perceptions are gravely altered in the public discourse. Calling for a NATO military intervention is debated rather than condemned outright. This is much like how the "liberation of Libya" was brought about by American and French warplanes and aerial bombing campaigns. We hear about the "liberation of Aleppo" in the news. Yet these are foreign militants backed by western imperial governments that are doing most of this

“liberation” against the National Syrian Army.

Since its inception; the so-called Syrian revolution was wrapped in a chronic aura of self-glorification, a neatly packaged pretence of sainthood and holier-than-thou grandeur. No one was allowed to criticize the rebels, their questionable political inclinations (questionable at best, downright treacherous at worst) and/or the numerous criminal acts they’ve committed under the fig leaves of freedom and democracy. They were saints, idealists, David standing up to a diabolical Goliath and most importantly the “civilized” west’s darlings, armed only with mobile phones, banners and twitter accounts.

This was a reverence for an uprising on a scale rarely seen. The Syrian opposition was given substantial media clout exploited to the maximum extent possible. Suddenly the rebellion was above all accusation and skepticism; anyone who would even dare to allude to any of the numerous shenanigans, misdeeds and wrongdoings undertaken by the FSA or the SNC would immediately be labelled an absolute advocate of tyranny or a “Shabih” for Bashar Al-Assad. And what takes the cake is the fact that those who oppose the Syrian opposition’s views on democracy and the future of Syria may very well get tossed out of third-story windows or suffer a fate that pretty much resembles that of the Berri family’s: machine-gunned at point blank range amidst jubilant chants of “Allahu Akbar”... democracy at its best indeed.

Why don’t western reporters take a look at the graphic video footage that show rebels revelling in their criminal excesses and butchery; the latest of which comes from Aleppo, and it shows the mutilated bodies of postal workers (of course if you’re a public servant in Syria then you must be a Shabbih, right?) being thrown off the Post Office building... and yes you guessed it... amidst fervent cheers of “Allahu Akbar”, because it wouldn’t be complete without the religious tinge, emphasizing the morbid fact that this was actually God’s work being done.

In reality; the so-called Syrian rebels are just as far removed from their contrived and propagandized mantra of democracy, human rights and political pluralism as the regime they’re claiming to revolt against; and when the United States, France and Britain become active partners in any revolution, you know there’s something instinctively awry with this picture.

Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar (the latter two far from being the holy grails of democracy) have been working overtime under the auspices of the imperial west to ensure that the only road open to the Syrian crisis is the one that leads to civil war. They took full advantage of an already laid groundwork of a previous, violent, NATO-sponsored democracy- spreading-endeavor in Libya to plunge Syria into this hideous orgy of mayhem and wars by proxies; romanticizing the “way of the gun” and swaying the Syrian public into this quicksand of internal bloodletting.

It’s as if the Syrian “revolution” has turned back the clock on the Arab Spring which began with such utopian exuberance in Tunisia and Egypt. Young nationalist activists have been forced into invisibility and powerlessness while socialists and leftist dissidents seeking real reforms have been sidelined in favour of trigger-happy radicals and foreign Islamist militants from various Arab and Islamic states (even western media felt that they had to concede this point recently after sort of tap-dancing around the issue for months).

And with the heavy militarization of the revolution (which began during the early stages of

the civic movement – way earlier than what most mainstream media outlets would have us believe), the Syrian uprising had yet another stake driven through its heart, especially when taking into account the sources of funding and weapons’ supplies that have been flowing into the country non-stop for the past year and a half. The vaults of Khaleeji Sheikhdoms are wide open to bankroll an armed insurgency aimed only at reconfiguring Syria’s pivotal role within the geopolitical map of the region at the growing expense of the Syrian people’s legitimate aspirations for social justice, more political freedoms and ending state corruption.

The Syrian people didn’t ask for a redirection of their current government’s foreign policy of supporting resistance movements in Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq. The Syrian people didn’t ask for a puppet regime aligned with the US. The Syrian people didn’t ask for a crippling economic warfare thinly cloaked as “smart sanctions” against the Assad regime. And they certainly didn’t ask for foreign interventions in their name that will without a doubt have devastating consequences on their own country, leaving it torn, ravished and in tatters

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