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Imperialism today

In Pakistan and elsewhere: The new fascisms in the making

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Mathews N Lyons, an independent researcher and scholar on reactionary movements, has defined fascism as: “... a form of extreme right wing ideology that celebrates the nation or the race as an organic community transcending all other loyalties. It emphasises a myth of national or racial rebirth after a period of decline or destruction. To this end, fascism calls for a ‘spiritual revolution’ against signs of moral decay such as individualism and materialism, and seeks to purge ‘alien’ forces and groups that threaten the organic community. Fascism tends to celebrate masculinity, youth, mystical unity, and the regenerative power of violence. Often, but not always, it promotes racial superiority doctrines, ethnic persecution, imperialist expansion, and genocide”.

Various forms of new fascism have emerged worldwide during the last 30 years. Among them are the Taliban and co. One of the first consequences of the phenomenal destabilising power of capitalist globalisation is the spectacular rise of new fascisms with a potential mass base. Some take relatively classical forms, like the Golden Dawn in Greece, situating themselves in new xenophobic and identity-based reflexes.

But the phenomenon that is now dominant is the assertion of fascist currents with religious references – and not with people/state, race and nation. These now pose a considerable threat in countries like India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Sri Lanka and several other African and Asian countries.

The Muslim world does not have a monopoly in this field; but it is certainly in the Muslim world that this has taken on a particular international dimension, with ‘trans-border’ movements like the Islamic State or the Taliban with their mass presence in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan and networks that are connected more or less formally from Morocco to Indonesia and even in the south of Philippines.

Fascist movements are not organically related to ‘big capital’ as was the case in Nazi Germany, but they exert fascist terror, including in daily life. Where they exist, they occupy the ‘political niche’ of fascism – and they pose new political problems for our generations of anti-fascist resistance on a large scale.

This is the most serious threat and challenge posed to progressive forces today, not only in Muslim countries but worldwide.

Not very long ago, a significant part of the international radical left considered that the rise of groups such as the Taliban had a progressive and anti-imperialist character. However, even when a group like the Taliban confronts the United States, it represents a frightening counter-revolutionary force. Over time those who maintain these positions are fewer today, but ‘campism’ remains present in this field.

There is a rise of neo-fascist type organisations – neo-Nazi, racist and inward-looking identities. This has become a worldwide phenomenon. We are living in a period where a significant number of Muslims think that religious fundamentalism is equal to anti-imperialism. They believe that these extremists are against the US and fighting the neo-colonial policies of imperialist forces.

Neo-imperialism is intact today. Can we use this term for China and Russia? Both are capitalist powers. That is an important question.

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The debate on new formations based on religion is linked to the nature of imperialism and anti-imperialism today. The initial debates on imperialism go back to the beginning of the 20th century, to the time of the completion of the formation of nation states in the west and colonial empires and the inter-imperialist war aiming to modify the division of the world. All definitions of imperialism of that time reflect this geopolitical context.

The revolutions following the First and Second World Wars upset the geopolitical framework, with a new more complex configuration combining the opposition of revolution and counter-revolution, 'blocs' of west and east, decolonisation and zones of more or less exclusive influence, inter-bureaucratic (USSR/China) and inter-imperialist competition within this framework.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries in the nineties, the US took a leading position to dictate political and economical terms. They wanted similar economic conditions in all the countries, promoted by the World Bank and the IMF. This was met by a colossal anti-globalisation movement.

From the 1990s till today, there has been a rather radical change. Initially, the traditional imperialist bourgeoisies and states were veritable conquerors, with penetration of the markets of the east, intervention in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) and so on. Then there was military stagnation, the financial crisis, the emergence of new powers (China) and the Arab revolutions.

All this led to a loss of geopolitical initiative and control, as a result of which today Washington reacts more on an emergency basis than in planning imposition of its order on the world. It was George W Bush who had the adventurist policy of invading Iraq which ended up in disaster. Iraq was a major defeat for US imperialism and things went totally out of control in the whole region particularly in Syria and Iraq. The emergence of the Islamic State has to be seen in this context.

Attempts to use Isis were made in the initial period after US failure to put a effective government in Iraq. Isis was used to replace the government of Iraq resulting in unprecedented power for the Isis not only in the region but around the world.

Overall, what we are witnessing in the Arab world is that counter-revolutions dominate – in the shape of the IS and various other formations. We are dealing today with the contradictions between capitalist states, an environmental crisis and reactionary counter-imperialist movements. These reactionary counter-revolutionary forces are the new fascists in the making, and have attracted a large portion of the middle class educated youth.

Those who have not joined these ultra-right neo-fascist trends are joining right-wing parties which are also claiming to be revolutionary organisations. Variants of that can be seen in the shape of the Pakistan Awami Tehreek and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf. These new formations in Pakistani politics are the champions of masculinity, youth, mystical unity and regenerative power of violence like the fascist forces.

Organisations like the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, Jamaatud Dawa, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Sipah-e-Mohammed, Jaish Mohammed are different shapes of new fascisms in the making. They all want to take over the state by military means, mainly relying on the discontent of the middle class against the system.

They all are sectarian and violent. They all want to eliminate their political opponents physically. They are against religious minorities. Thus, all the features of fascism are there apart from the fact that these new fascisms rely on religion instead of nation as was the case in classical fascism.

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A united front of all progressive forces, radical social movements and trade union and peasant movements is the only answer for an effective counter reply. This united front can discuss various options including armed resistance to fight against neo-fascist forces.

Relying on the military means of the state or on US imperialism's occupational strategies will not help eliminate extremists. On the contrary, extremists can and have gained their identity of being anti-imperialists due to such attacks. However, we must be absolute clear that the anti-imperialism of extremism is a foolish concept.