



## IV512 - September 2017

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### Decisive days in Catalonia

30 September 2017, by **Josep María Antentas**

1. After five years of eternal *process* in which the grandiloquence of the key actors was proportional to the extraordinary sluggishness of events and the parties' consistent desire to avoid a decisive clash with the Spanish state, we have finally arrived at the moment of truth. It's not the final scene of the film, but it is a critical passage in determining the ending.

"The process ends, now the Mambo [1] begins," as the far-left, pro-independence Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP) succinctly summarized the changing situation. A mambo, don't forget, might have started back in in 2014 if the Catalan government of Artur Mas of the ruling Democratic Convergence of Catalonia [now known as the Catalan European Democratic Party, PDeCAT] had not retreated in November of that year when it abandoned the attempt to conduct an independence referendum (a "consultation" in the language of the time) after it was prohibited by the

Spanish Constitutional Court. A mistake that, surprisingly enough, met with hardly any resistance on the part of the other actors in the process (with the initial exception of the Republican Left of Catalonia, ERC), none of whom drew up a public balance sheet nor explained the reasons behind the ongoing rodeo over the last three years.

2. The Catalan parliament's September 6 approval of the Referendum Act marked a point of no return. Since then, officially speaking, Catalonia has entered into a situation of double legitimacy—a duality of legitimacies (and legalities) on a collision course that, naturally, can only exist temporarily until it is settled in favor of one or the other. The scenario presents an asymmetric, unstable and unequal institutional double power (that is, the power of Spanish state institutions and those of the Catalan state, which have placed themselves outside of their own legality).

It's important to keep in mind just how "asymmetric, unstable, and unequal" this relation is to accurately understand the conjuncture and to avoid the mistake of seeing this as a confrontation between equivalent or similar powers. There is, in fact, a tremendous inequality between the two. "Between equal rights force decides," as Marx wrote in chapter VIII of the first volume of *Capital* when talking about the fight over the length of the workday between workers and employers.

Forgetting this factor can lead to naïve or illusory visions about the nature of the State—not about the Spanish state specifically, but also about the modern capitalist state in general. At the same time, we must remember that "force" cannot be separated from the legitimacy of the power that uses it, nor from the political context in which it operates. Legitimacy and context determine the degree to which said power can deploy force. And neither of these are

fixed variable, rather they change along with events. Brute force and political force, therefore, in the broadest sense of the terms, permanently intermingle.

3. Any movement must be able to assess the world and changing situations in terms that are favorable to its interests while communicating confidence in its capacity to win as well as the belief that its objectives are attainable. In the independence movement's narrative, the term "disconnection" has been used regularly in order to visualize the unilateral materialization of independence. The concept carries a pleasantly agreeable tone, free from stridency and tensions, softening any feeling of conflict or insecurity. In this sense, it has definitely played an important role in making the independence movement's strategic horizon appear credible. But it has come at the cost of enormously simplifying the complexity of the project's analysis and of how confronting the state is understood.

The idea of disconnection brings to mind the painless turning off of an electric circuit. There is a well-known scene in Stanley Kubrick's 2001: a Space Odyssey that clearly illustrates how to disconnect (oneself) from a superior power. This takes place in the part of the film "Mission to Jupiter," when the Discovery approaches the great gaseous planet. After checking for anomalies in the HAL 9000, the supercomputer in control of the ship, astronauts Dave Bowman and Frank Poole plan to disconnect from it. After Poole dies as a result of HAL's action, Bowman gains access to the room where HAL's central circuits are locked up, gradually deactivating the computer, leading it to gradually lose consciousness. The machine regresses to infancy and ends up, before shutting down, singing a children's song "Daisy Bell." The great Leviathan who controlled the ship, a humanized super-computer, dies. [2]

Contrary to this image, in reality, it is not possible to disconnect from a state. Neither is it possible to break with a state without a confrontation. Thus, paradoxically, the idea of disconnection, although very different, recalls Antonio Negri's theory of the

exodus that has been in vogue over the two previous decades. In this case, not advocating an exodus in the sense of creating liberated non-state spaces, but rather in the sense of creating another state.

However, no such agreeable disconnection from a state exists against its will. Leaving cases involving a military clash aside, there are examples of ruptures with states that come as a result of intense tug-of-wars and mass political-social confrontations that, intermingled with international geopolitics, may force a state to accept a democratic denouement of a contest contrary to its interests. But all this has very little to do with the strategic imaginary with which the independence movement has been played out up until now.

Hence, the capital importance of what happens in the coming days. The most important thing is for the Catalan government and its allies to continue forward until the last breath. And, crucially, popular mobilizations must push their way onto the scene, nourished by a torrent of ordinary people.

4. The movement for independence has been defined by its imposing mass size and staying power. Since 2012, under the direction of the Catalan National Assembly (ANC), each September 11—Catalonia's traditional nationalist day—has expressed this support through methodically planned demonstrations, even if these are typically followed by very little movement street presence until that date on the following year. Behind every S11, there is real organization from below, in each town and neighborhood, although absolutely dependent on the political leadership of the ANC itself (and to a lesser extent the Æ'mnium, a Barcelona-based Catalan cultural association).

Over the last five years, the movement has demonstrated very little spontaneous capacity from below or the ability to overflow its own leading organizations, negatively impacting the movement at various junctures. The absence of any pressure beyond that officially directed by the ANC in the weeks prior to the N9 consultation

in 2014—either to prevent the Spanish state's actions or the Catalan government's retreat — is the clearest example.

The events of September 20, when [ordinary people flooded into the streets to in the face of the sudden intensification of Spanish state repression](#), mark a drastic change of pace and logic. The movement has taken on a relatively sharper, vital, and electrifying dynamic, more focused on sustained mobilization. A new phase has begun in sync with an intelligent, strategic emphasis on nonviolence that has characterized it from the beginning.

The ANC and Æ'mnium are playing a leading role in what has taken place over the last week, but their style is more conducive to a contained mobilization rather than popular actions from below spilling over from below and this approach may continue to impact the movement at critical instants. The great challenge over the next days is as follows: exactly how to combine the leadership of these two organizations—which no one questions—with the need for the explosive spontaneity characteristic of the M15 movement.

We cannot yet assess the scope of the response that started on September 20. Clearly, it has changed the tone of the political environment. But it still may tend toward stabilization, or be the initiator of general outbreak prior to October 1, or on the day of the referendum itself, if the Spanish State pursues further repressive actions.

5. At this key juncture, the basic limits of the whole independence process are clearly emerging; that is, the delinking of the proposal for a Catalan state from a concrete plan for social mobilization and democratic regeneration. In other words, the disassociation with the legacy, the meaning and the agenda of the anti-austerity Indignados movement that erupted on May 15, 2011 (M15) when millions occupied city and town squares across the territory of the Spanish state.

Both movements have galvanized and represent distinct parts of the Catalan people. The *people of the squares* in

2011 are not the same as the *people of the independence process*, even if there are important crossovers that we must not forget. To do so would be to read reality too mechanically. In Catalonia, part of the middle classes and the precarious youth gravitated towards M15 and toward the political options that were born from it (Podem, the Catalan expression of the Podemos party and the radical Catalunya en Com<sup>1</sup> party, neither of which have consistently *advocated* independence, even if they *supported* Catalonia's right to self-determination). Another part moved more sharply toward the independence movement (in its diverse variants). And there are, no doubt, others that are swinging between both poles, providing a weak connection between the bifurcated futures enshrined in the independence movement and the legacy of M15.

However, M15, beyond both the precarious student/youth component and the critical role of the middle classes buffeted by the economic crisis, also contained a *mass, neighborhood* component, featuring popular and working-class participation during an epoch when the trade union movement as such was decomposing. These last features are, critically, absent in the independence movement and represent its Achilles' heel.

Thus, the movement suffers from the lack of an anchoring social sector both quantitatively and qualitatively, both numerically and strategically. And, it goes without saying, it has been the main source of controversies and headaches for each member of the Catalan left, whether or not they define themselves in such terms, and whether or not they are participating in the independence process or stand outside it. We must not minimize this problem nor pretend that it does not exist, as the left wing of the independence forces have tended to do. Nor should it be used as a pretext to remain outside this new movement that emerged in 2012 and thereby end up making the its weaknesses worse, as Catalunya en Com<sup>2</sup> and those it influences have done.

In this sense, various initiatives carried out by sectors of the trade union movement, in conjunction with

social justice activists, are particularly important, including: the Barcelona dockworkers' decision to refuse to service ships carrying Guardia Civil deployed from other parts of the Spanish state and the announcement of a call for an October 3 general strike (however propagandistic it may be) by several smaller unions.

6. Born formally in March 2012, the Catalan National Assembly (ANC) provided a strategic road map toward independence based on the construction of a transversal and plural movement articulated exclusively around the goal of independence. This pure and simple independence had an undeniable attractive power, although it was in itself a key strategic limit for the new movement, both from the point of view of its stated objective (independence) and from the point of view of opening doors to social and democratic change (an objective formally shared by many of the movement's members).

Retrospectively, without falling into the nostalgia of what could have been but was not to be, it is enough to ask ourselves how things might have turned out if the movement had paired the slogan of independence in 2012 with a program of social mobilization and basic democratic regeneration. The answer is clear: the Catalan right and Artur Mas' government would have felt even more uncomfortable with the independence tsunami, yet they still could not have detached themselves from it while independence process advocates would have expanded their base by attracting popular and working class supporters. If this path had been taken, traditional leftist political organizations (as well as new ones that arose after 2014) and the unions would have faced difficulties remaining indifferent. [43]

One factor that makes the situation more complicated is an act of double standard of United Nations Security Council towards nuclear power states. The unfair structure of the United Nations has accelerated North Korea's nuclear development for their political-system security. Before condemning North Korea's nuclear development, leading

countries in the United Nations Security Council should abandon their own nuclear weapons

## Restoration of the right to self-determination

The right of self-determination is an issue that cannot be avoided when discussing the situation on the Korean Peninsula. Moon Jae-in Administration and past US administrations want to avoid this. Since its foundation in 1948, North Korea insisted on national reunification through self-determination. They do not want reunification of the peninsula to be dependent on external forces because their country was divided as a result of the violation of the right to self-determination by Japanese imperialism, American imperialism and the actions of the Soviet Union. This right which had been infringed was not restored even after the end of the Cold War. Before discussing unification, the working class of North Korea and South Korea should restore the right of self-determination first.

## Next step to build workers' state

As I said earlier, there were many problems in previous international policy toward North Korea. Detente on the Korean Peninsula should be made by the working class as a political entity, one from which the right of self-determination was taken away by external forces: Japanese imperialism, American imperialism, and Soviet hegemonism. The unilateral and unequal relations between the US- and South Korea should be corrected. The mobilized power of the working class of East Asia is required for a conclusion of a peace agreement. International working class solidarity is required for denuclearization in East Asia and to avoid a war crisis. The working class of South and North Korea need the complete right of self-determination again and go to the next step: dialogue to build their workers' state without bureaucracy, imperialism, and hegemonism.



# In a city where freedom is declining, a few posters can have a big impact”the Hong Kong poster dispute

16 September 2017, by **Robin Lee**

Only a few days into the new academic year and already conflict has blown up after posters were put up at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) advocating Hong Kong independence. The posters were soon removed by the university, with the school claiming that the discussion of independence violated Hong Kong law. The move was condemned by CUHK Student Union and since then new pro-independence posters and banners have appeared at CUHK and been put up by student unions and individuals at other universities across Hong Kong. This has led to increasing tensions and conflict between students and student unions supporting the posters (or supporting the right for students to express their views) and university managements and some mainland students, who have found the posters offensive and attempted to take down or paste over the posters with posters of their own.

Amongst the posters that have appeared on the walls and clashes that have ensued, ugly and offensive slogans have been posted and expressed by both pro and anti-independence ‘sides’. During one such clash, former CUHK Student Union president Ernie Chow told one student who was opposing the independence posters to “Go back to Chee-na!” The use of the term “Chee-na” is highly offensive to many Chinese people due to its use by Japan during its occupation of China during World War II and should be condemned in the strongest of terms. It is also perhaps symptomatic of the xenophobia that has grown along with the growth in right wing localism following the Umbrella Movement, something which has also led to divisions between Hong Kong’ student and democracy movements. The term

“Chee-na” was also used by localist Youngspiration duo Sixtus Leung and Yau Wai-ching in October 2016 during their oath-taking at the Legislative Council prior to their disqualification.

In another related incident a poster appeared on the democracy wall at the Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK) taunting the Education Undersecretary, Christine Choi Yuk-lin, over the very recent suicide of her son. Similar posters were also subsequently posted up at City University. Two days later another poster, this time most likely posted by supporters of Beijing, appeared on the wall at EdUHK congratulating the late Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo on his death and the house-imprisonment of his wife Liu Xia by the Communist Party.

Again this represents highly insensitive and immature behaviour by a small number of individuals, and the taunting of the Education Undersecretary has been labelled as “inappropriate” by thirteen student unions in a joint statement that they issued over the weekend “on the controversy surrounding democracy wall”. Although their statement also stated that the slogans were nevertheless “excusable”, considering the Education Bureau’s “malicious policies against students” including the TSA exam and national education as well as the lack of effective channels for students to be able to express their discontent. The poster has also received strong condemnation from the university authorities at EdUHK (with their releasing of security camera footage of two young people putting up the posters perhaps further disproportionately escalating the issue), Hong Kong Chief Executive

Carrie Lam, and several voices in wider society.

Nevertheless, while these later incidents have amplified outrage and perhaps acted as distraction from the initial issue, as far as the original issue of posters in support of Hong Kong independence is concerned, this diversion does not mean there are grounds for limiting freedom of expression as was first attempted when the posters were torn down at CUHK or as has been implied when the Chief Executive characterized the posters as “a violation of our country’s sovereignty”, stated that “academic freedom and autonomy of tertiary institutions are not excuses for the advocacy of fallacies,” and urged the university administrations to take appropriate actions.

In Hong Kong law freedom of speech and freedom of expression are supposed to be protected by Article 27 of the Basic Law and the Hong Kong Bill of Rights Ordinance. In a situation which allows for and is tolerant of freedom of expression, when a view is expressed it is normal that not everyone will agree with that view and some may choose to express a counter opinion. That the subject of the posters of pro-independence advocates is criticised by others who disagree might be expected. In such a situation, similarly expressed opposition views should also be equally open to criticism. This is not absolute as there may be ground where power imbalances and institutional discrimination sometimes mean that limits (for instance against hate speech) may be needed to protect marginalized groups.

The student poster controversy in Hong Kong however, has not been a

situation where students with opposing opinions have simply been allowed to express their views. The difference is that the removal of the original pro-independence posters has the backing of the institutions, which removed the posters declaring them illegal without basis. A subsequent letter sent to the student union stated that the posters “violated Hong Kong’s laws and also violated the school’s constant stance of absolutely opposing Hong Kong independence.” It is therefore an issue beyond a war of words or expressions of differing opinions between different parties at the universities. In the first instance, the university already used its authority to intervene and attempt to repress freedom of expression

This might also beg the question of whose interests do Hong Kong’s universities really serve? In their statement the student unions condemn the erosion of freedom and university autonomy:

“Universities are where thoughts and opinions are exchanged, and democracy walls are platforms for students to speak our mind. The regime is now making an explicit effort to limit our freedom of expression through exerting pressure on university authorities to punish those whose speech may have intimidated the people in power”.

Indeed Hong Kong has been facing a

situation where concerns over academic freedom and political interference in academic appointments and funding has been growing and increasing pressure to adopt positions more favourable to China has been reported by academics and the media. Recently pro-Beijing lawmaker Junius Ho Kwan-yiu has launched a campaign to put pressure on the University of Hong Kong to sack Benny Tai, the law professor who co-founded the Occupy Central movement.

Moreover, while the CUHK assertion that the posters violate Hong Kong law alone lacks grounding, appealing to the law alone in defence of free speech and other rights is perhaps a little bit naïve considering how Beijing has already made clear that it is happy to intervene and to impose its own “interpretation” to further its interests. Following Beijing’s interpretation of the Basic Law concerning the oath taking of law makers, not only were the two democratically elected Youngspiration lawmakers disqualified, but also four more progressive pro-democracy lawmakers were subsequently disqualified in the same way.

Although Chief Executive Carrie Lam has said that the poster issue is not an issue of free speech in her criticisms which seem aimed at undermining basis for such posters to be legitimately posted, on the contrary it is actually more correct to say that the

issue is more than simply one of free speech alone. The ideas expressed in the posters stem from a deep dissatisfaction with the current system which has been exacerbated by increasing intervention by Beijing and led to a decline in Hong Kong autonomy. In this context, support for greater self-determination and even the growing popularity of the idea of Hong Kong independence might not be unsurprising. At the same time, it is also important to note that there is a significant power imbalance between state backed infringements on freedom of speech and expression and civil liberties and a few statements posted up expressing the idea of Hong Kong independence.

Nevertheless, if Beijing, with the help of the SAR government, continues to erode Hong Kong autonomy and further undermine existing freedoms and limited democratic rights it may face stronger expressions of opposition. Increasing repression and silencing of dissenting views is likely to enrage more and more people and will potentially act to push an increasing number of people into adopting more radical positions. Words displayed on posters are comparatively harmless, unless Beijing chooses to make them otherwise.

*September 15, 2017*

[Borderles HK](#)

# People Must Self-organize, Keep Up the Pressure on Their Governments If We Are to Bring About Radical Change

## 15 September 2017, by **Éric Toussaint**

**Looking back over your career as a militant, we see that you have been active in numerous political and social movements. When did you decide to make the struggle**

**against repayment of debt your main cause?**

Quite early on. In 1983, in Liege, my home-town of over 200,000 inhabitants, we had to fight a drastic

austerity programme served on the pretext that there was an enormous public debt to be paid off. We carried out a militant audit of the debt, and it was the first time we realized that we could challenge its legitimacy. In

1986, a campaign was launched in Liege to demand that illegitimate debt should not be paid. Moreover in 1982, many Third World countries, as they are dubbed, had already suffered debt crises and our struggle was inspired by the examples of two major international political figures: that of Fidel Castro who in 1985 had called for the creation of a common front of Southern countries [against paying off debt](#), and that of an African leader who followed the same path as Cuba the same year: Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso. In 1989, my analysis of the situation convinced me of the need to struggle to abolish debt in the North too, even if the South remained the priority. For all these reasons I took part in founding the Committee for the Abolition of Third World Debt in 1990, the CADTM, which changed its name in 2016 to Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debt.

### **What do you mean by illegitimate debt?**

It means any debt which was contracted to serve the particular interests of a privileged minority against the general interest of the population. Minorities, for example, such as the ruling elite or bankers who are responsible for the financial crisis yet have been bailed out. Those bail-outs have triggered an explosion of public debt as was the case in Spain, Portugal, Belgium and other countries a few years ago. Illegitimate debt may also be illegal, in the context of colossal contracts where creditors make abusively huge profits, or when the interest rates or certain conditions of the contract render it null and void in law.

### **As well as public debt, the CADTM has recently been focusing on another problem. You talk about the effects of private debt: microcredit, mortgages, student loans... How do these types of debt work?**

Over the last ten years we have noticed that there has been a general increase in illegitimate private household debt. This is what happened in the USA with the subprimes bubble - [mortgages](#) which were granted to people carrying a high risk of non-payment. More than

500,000 abusive mortgage contracts were identified. For some, there was not even the signature of the contracting parties, as they were "agreed" over the telephone and thus without the contract having been read. Because of bankers' misconduct, nearly 14 million families have been evicted from their homes between 2007 and today in the United States. In Spain, nearly 300,000 families have been evicted. Student debt is another form of the explosion of private illegitimate debt, especially in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Japan. It is surely no coincidence that these are the countries that have undergone extreme neoliberal reforms in the domain of education with budget cuts and the removal of grants, obliging many students to get into debt to pay for their studies. In the United States, two students out of three have an average debt of 27,000 US dollars and in Japan, one in two is indebted to the tune of 30,000 US dollars. Yet another example of expanding illegitimate private debt is microcredit. Since 2005 an international campaign has been under way to sell microcredit. The United Nations declared 2005 "International Year of Microcredit". The Bengali economist Muhammad Yunus, promoter of microcredit and founder of Grameen Bank, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006. Presidents like Zapatero of Spain, Lula of Brazil or Chirac of France have given public support to the initiative. It is now clear that it was a trap, another mechanism for reproducing poverty (see [this](#) and [this](#)).

### **How does microcredit work?**

It generally takes the form of loans of 100 to 300 US dollars. At first, in the case of Grameen Bank (the first one to grant microcredit in Bangladesh), you needed the backing of 5 to 25 people to obtain microcredit. In other words, if the borrower was unable to repay the loan, the guarantors would pay in his or her place. And now, someone asking for a loan of 100 US dollars must make a down-payment of 30 dollars as a guarantee to the bank, and will only be lent 70 dollars net. At the same time, they must pay interest at a rate of between 30 and 50% on the full amount of 100 dollars. If the borrower defaults, the bank keeps the

30 dollars guarantee. This is fraud on a grand scale. At present, in Bangladesh, of the country's 160 million inhabitants, 20 million use microcredit. When you think about it, it is a sly strategic move on the part of finance capital to extract profit from the 2 billion adults in the world who live without any bank account. At the time of writing, nearly 100 million people use microcredit. For capital, loans of 200 or 300 euros contracted to poor people are chickenfeed, but in the end what counts is making a profit. In the case of microcredit, this is somewhere between 20 and 25% of the investment. Excellent figures for a capitalist.

### **Before someone asks for microcredit, they must have been having problems...**

Of course. There is a world-wide degradation of public services. In many regions, peasants have access to public agricultural credit banks. In the context of World Bank and IMF recommendations, along with the shift to the right of many developing countries, these banks have been replaced by microcredit agencies. With the Green Revolution, peasants get into debt to be able to buy seeds and pesticides from TNC such as Bayer-Monsanto. When the harvest is poor and they cannot repay, they get even deeper into debt. Let us not forget that it is mainly women who take out microcredit loans (81% according to statistics). And finally, they are the ones who suffer the most from poverty.

In some of your articles, you emphasize the strategy of staggered [structural adjustment](#) – the application of austerity measures in one sector but not in others, to avoid unification of struggles. The OECD has even endorsed the strategy by publishing a guide telling governments [how to apply it](#). Can it be that capitalism is no longer afraid to show its hand?

So it seems. For years, the World Bank has been regularly publishing a report, *Doing Business*, which includes a classification of countries where those whose conditions are most favorable for mass lay-offs or who have the worst working-

conditions get the most points. It is very important that workers should understand that the employers' offensive relies on governments' arguments concerning public debt reduction. The spokespersons for big capital show arrogance of a kind never displayed before Margaret Thatcher came to power. Today they are ever more shameless in expressing their desires and expectations.

**The Trans-Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (TAFTA) between the United States and the European Union (also known as the TTIP, Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) is on hold but the CETA (Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement between Canada and the European Union) is going ahead and has reached the stage of ratification. Is this an example of the desires and expectations of capitalism?**

Yes indeed, and it is a very significant challenge. We have to fight these agreements because once they have been ratified and are added to the other internal agreements and conventions of the EU already in existence, we will lose all our rights. These agreements run counter to the interests of people and [common goods](#).

**You sat on the Committee for the Truth on Greek Public Debt in 2015. What did you conclude from the audit?**

We advised the Tsipras government to suspend debt payments and to confront the creditors with a unilateral act of debt suspension. However, under pressure from the creditors, Tsipras chose to capitulate, which was quite traumatic for the population. I was staying in a working-class neighbourhood in Athens where the expectations of the people were palpable. They were ready to support a break-away government, as they clearly indicated in the referendum. Despite those results, the Tsipras government wanted to capitulate; they were [not ready](#) to make use of the victory of the no-vote in the referendum held on 5 July 2015. The effects of that capitulation on the Greek population can still be felt.

**What is wrong with the European Left? Why can't it manage to connect with the population?**

I think they lack the courage to commit to the application of radical policies and to disobey unjust laws and agreements. SYRIZA won the elections by promising to break away from austerity. And in many countries, there is a fairly significant section of the population who are favourable to the political solutions of the radical left. That is how I interpret the good results obtained by Bernie Sanders in the United States, Jeremy Corbyn in the United Kingdom, SYRIZA, Podemos and Jean-Luc Mélenchon. In the latter case, he had only two points less than Marine Le Pen and was thus a hair's breadth away from being in the second round in the presidential of May 2017. He did that using a radical leftwing discourse which had certain media up in arms. The radical Left has a window of opportunity that was not there ten years ago. If the Left was more offensive, more combative and more radical, we would have every chance of winning elections and above all applying policies that would break away from capitalism and its neoliberal policies.

**Are left-wing parties self-limiting?**

Definitely. Many leaders and parties of the radical Left, when they see that they have a chance of getting into government, think that they themselves have to limit their programme and they try to adapt their discourse to Realpolitik. There is still an opportunity to get out of the crisis situation and bring about social justice and structural changes that would favour the majority of the population. However if the radical majorities do not seize that opportunity, be sure that the far right will.

**You have advised the governments of Correa in Ecuador and Chávez in Venezuela, among others. Do you think that these Latin-American governments have had more political will to confront power?**

At the start of their mandates, yes. In the case of Venezuela, during the first ten years under Chávez, very positive measures were taken. It was the same

with Evo Morales in Bolivia and Rafael Correa in Ecuador. Then later on, the measures they took were Realpolitik, more moderate and disappointing. The lesson I learn from all this is that, while it is possible to resist and apply breakaway policies in the first years of a mandate, as the three examples show, it is fundamental for the population to self-organize and to put pressure on governments to keep them to the line of profound change. I would like to say that when I advised these governments, [\[1\]](#) I always maintained my independence. I was not paid a cent by any of the States and I never signed any contracts with their ministers or presidents. This is a rule that I never break or bend, in order to preserve my right to total criticism at all times.

**In recent years you have advised certain municipalities in the "Open Cities" network in Spain on debt themes. If you were to analyse their dynamics two years after the general election, how would you evaluate the potential of the initiatives?**

It all depends how willing the administrations really are to constitute a municipal front against illegitimate debt and austerity. If such a front is constituted, it could take serious actions to disobey the Montoro Law and Article 135 of the Spanish Constitution, and so on (see [this](#) and [this](#) (in French, Spanish or Portuguese only)). If no action is taken, even if the country has enormous potential, with high hopes and many well-meaning people from all the citizens' movements, nothing concrete will change. It is not enough for municipalist councils that want change merely to make pleasing declarations and improve transparency of public budgets; unless they unite to fight austerity, they will only bring disappointment and discouragement.

For example, I have not seen many cases of remunicipalization of public services, one of the most important commitments of these bodies. I know it is not easy, but without direct confrontation of the government using the Constitution and the action of a broad front, there will be no progress.



**Let us talk now about instruments of struggle against debt and alternatives. One of the mechanisms you put to great use is auditing. How far can it actually bring about change, beyond the desire for transparency?**

It has enormous potential because it involves citizens, people who until now had never questioned the legitimacy of debt. The audit leads people to question the legitimacy of actions and policies of their government when they are unjust. Once you have begun to question the logic of indebtedness, you have attained a higher level of awareness. As long as citizens do not control and pressurize their governments, thinking of them as friendly and safe, there will not be any real change. There need to be political forces with the courage and the strength to apply radical policies, but even more importantly, the population

needs to be mobilized, critical, ready to revolt when the government does not fulfil its promises. Without those two conditions, there will be no profound structural change.

**In your writings, you point out different radical leftwing measures which have to go through State control, such as the nationalization of banks. But do you think a social and solidarity-based economy is an alternative?**

It is fundamental for local, solidarity-based initiatives to develop, from creating a local currency to organizing consumer or work cooperatives. But even if you develop a social and solidarity-based economy, it would not be contagious enough to trigger a real change in society. What is also needed is a government ready to take measures, change laws, change the constitution, oppose international agreements and so on. That is why, if

we want to move on towards ecological transition, production and distribution of energy must be under our control. By dismantling nuclear or electric power stations, the State would be controlling the energy sector and could transform it into a public service. In the case of banking, there could be a similar process: to confront major banks like HSBC, Barclays, DB or Santander, you would have to confront the dominant banking sector, while at the same time developing ethical banking. These are jobs for a government supported by its people. A social and solidarity-based economy is very important and we must get to grips with it urgently, but not at the expense of the institutional fight for structural change.

*Translated from French by Vicki Briault with Christine Pagnouille*

[Global Research](#)

## NSA's Cyberwarfare Blowback

**14 September 2017, by Peter Solenberger**

China suffered most from the May attacks, and Ukraine from the June attacks, but both attacks spread worldwide, including to Russia and the United States.

Some cybersecurity experts thought the May attacks came from North Korea; others thought they were made to look as if they came from North Korea. Why would North Korea target its ally China?

Some thought the June attacks came from Russia. Some thought they came from Iran. Others thought they were made to look as if they came from Russia or Iran.

The motive for the attacks was obscure. The hackers demanded ransom, but they used ineffective methods for collecting it. They may have made a few thousand dollars, but the authorities quickly shut down their public email addresses, making

payment in exchange for decryption impossible.

The combination of obvious technological prowess and apparent financial incompetence led to speculation that the hackers' ransom demands were a cover for a deeper operation to obtain credentials for a future attack. Or a dry run for a future attack. Or political disruption. Or simply mischief.

The source of the NSA malware was another mystery. A group calling itself the Shadow Brokers offered the NSA tools for sale last August and posted them for downloading free in April, after Microsoft had belatedly issued a patch to fix the vulnerability. The Shadow Brokers said they would release more NSA tools each month.

Were the Shadow Brokers hackers looking to make money? If so, why did they offer to sell the NSA tools so

publicly in August, rather than discreetly seek buyers? Why did they begin giving them away in April? Why did they so publicly declare that they would release more tools each month?

Were they hactivists seeking to expose the NSA's nefarious activities? Were they disillusioned NSA employees or contractors? Or was the attack an NSA operation, a cyberwarfare experiment disguised as a hacker attack?

Whatever the depth of the conspiracies, two facts are clear: 1) The NSA looked for and found vulnerabilities in the Windows operating system and, rather than alert Microsoft and the cybersecurity firms, developed malware "malicious software" to exploit the vulnerabilities. 2) The malware escaped the NSA's control and infected computers and networks of governments and corporations that



the NSA was supposedly trying to protect.

## Cybersecurity, Cyberintelligence and Cyberwarfare

The activities of the so-called “U.S. intelligence community” include cybersecurity, cyberintelligence and cyberwarfare.

Cybersecurity is defense against cyberattacks by governmental and nongovernmental actors. It involves finding weaknesses in computers and networks and devising ways to fix them and prevent intrusion. Virus protection software and ad-blockers are examples of this.

Cyberintelligence is spying on governments, corporations and people by digital means. It involves finding weaknesses in computers and networks and devising ways to exploit them to gather intelligence.

Edward Snowden revealed that the NSA collects metadata on almost every electronic communication in the United States and a great many in other countries. Metadata in this context is data about who contacts whom, by what means, where, when and for how long.

The NSA has tools to access the content of the communications too, unless they are strongly encrypted. Their doing so is supposedly limited by the requirement of court approval, but “national security” is a watchword that gets past most oversight.

Cyberwarfare is disrupting, damaging or destroying by digital means the military, economic or diplomatic power of an enemy.

The Stuxnet worm was an example of cyberwarfare. The NSA developed it to spread through a network of computers, conceal itself, and on command disrupt software controlling targeted equipment. The United States and Israel used it against Iranian nuclear centrifuges in 2010.

## Arrogance

So what happened in the case of the Shadow Brokers ransomware attack? The NSA had identified a weakness, decided to exploit it to create a cyberweapon, and then lost control of the weapon it created. The unintended consequences were the result of arrogance on many levels.

There was military arrogance in thinking that the new weapons could be wielded with impunity. But what goes around comes around. The United States is highly dependent on computers and networks, and others can develop and wield cyberweapons too.

Blowback happens. This has led governments to think twice about the use of biological, chemical and nuclear weapons, targeting civilians, indiscriminate use of land mines, cluster bombs, torture, etc., even if they still too often decide to use them.

There was imperial arrogance in thinking that the weapons could be used with impunity against less powerful countries.

The U.S. government knows that Russia and China can retaliate against U.S. spying and sabotage. Now it must contend with the possibility that North Korea and Iran can retaliate too. In countries around the world hackers are targeting the United States in the service of their governments, for profit, or for fun.

There’s capitalist arrogance in thinking that profit justifies all. The tools used in the ransomware attack were developed by the NSA. But they were developed in the culture of Google, Facebook, Twitter, etc, whose business is built on acquiring information about people and selling it for ads or other purposes.

In this culture human intelligence and decency are irrelevant. Money is its only measure. Let the market determine winners and losers.

There’s technological arrogance in thinking that development is necessarily beneficial “because we can develop it, we should.

This concern is particularly pertinent because the software the NSA is developing makes use of artificial intelligence. Once implanted, the malware investigates its environment, adjusts its behavior based on what it finds, tries various courses of action, and adjusts its behavior based on the results.

As with nuclear and many other technologies, the human handlers of the software can’t foresee the consequences. They don’t know what they don’t know.

## Social Technology

Technology can be beneficial. The problem is to control and direct it.

Capitalist governments use technology to dominate people. Imperialist governments use it to dominate other countries. Capitalist corporations use it to maximize profits. Researchers, engineers and entrepreneurs shaped by capitalism use it to get rich and famous.

This leads to an unstable world, increasingly dependent on technology but unable to control or direct it. The Shadow Brokers ransomware attack is a warning. Much, much worse will happen, unless human beings regain control of their technology.

Humanity must eliminate the dangers of military arrogance by eliminating militarism and war. This requires eliminating classes and nation-states, as Marxists have said for 170 years.

We must eliminate the dangers of imperial arrogance by eliminating imperialism. Workers of the world, unite; recognize the self-determination of nations; use the combined development of the global economy to eliminate the uneven development which leads to inequality and wars of domination.

We need to eliminate the dangers of capitalist arrogance by eliminating capitalism: Abolish private property in the means of production. Abolish copyrights and patents. Develop science and technology in public institutions run transparently by research workers.

Finally, we have to contain, if not eliminate, the dangers of technological arrogance by openly publishing the results of science, research and development. The achievements of human ingenuity should be common property. Together we can check foolish impulses and correct mistakes.

This is music of the future, of course. But much can be done today:

Join the ongoing fights for civil

liberties, privacy protections, restrictions on FBI, CIA and NSA spying, Internet freedom and Net neutrality. Participate in open source software projects, support Wikipedia and other open information projects, and contribute to progressive publications and Internet sites.

Oppose militarism and war, including the development and deployment of cyberweapons. Cut the military

budget. Open the secret budget of the security services to public scrutiny.

And in the course of this activity, raise the prospect of a future without the NSA, the CIA and the FBI, and without Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Apple, Amazon, Uber and other corporations which profit from the human need to communicate. Social networks should be truly free, and truly social.

[Against the Current](#)

# Militias and Crony Capitalism to Hamper Syria Reconstruction

**13 September 2017, by Joseph Daher**

This is the culmination of the focus of the major international and regional state actors on the “war on terror”, and consensus around Bashar Al-Asad remaining in power, both of which have strengthened the confidence of the dictator and the ruling class in Damascus.

However, there remain several challenges for the regime in reaching political and economic stability and securing funds for reconstruction. Some of these challenges are rooted in the internal contradictions and the nature of the regime as a patrimonial state and its need to satisfy divergent interests of actors who played an important role in supporting it, especially militias and crony capitalists.

## Lack of National and Foreign Investments

Reconstruction is a main project of the regime and crony capitalists, linked with a plan to consolidate their political and economic power, while rewarding foreign allies for their assistance with a share of the market. Reconstruction will also reinforce the neo-liberal policies of the deeply

indebted regime as it lacks the capacity to fund the reconstruction.

In early January 2017, following its victory in Eastern Aleppo, Damascus was planning to impose throughout the country Decree 66 [44], a law enacted in 2012 which had already dispossessed many Damascus residents of their properties. The decree expropriated the residents of two large informal regions on the southern edge of Damascus “the first in the Mezzeh district and the other in a large area going from Qadam to Daraya - and compensated them by distributing shares in the developments that were programmed to be built instead. According to Syria Report editor Jihad Yazigi, “whenever there have been these expropriation projects in Syria, compensation has been extremely low. It’s a very clear dispossession of these people. [...] This is a transfer of public assets, tax-free, to private companies” and it will be a big boost to regime cronies. [45].”

This plan will provide 12,000 housing units for an estimated 60,000 residents. There will be schools and restaurants, places of worship, even a multi-story car park and a shopping mall. [46]. Officials in Damascus justified this decree by claiming that

the objective was to enhance the quality of the housing and that other areas would follow to improve informal housing conditions throughout the country. [47]

Another case was in the city of Homs, when the municipality in September 2015 approved the plan for the reconstruction of the Baba Amro neighborhood. In March 2017, the municipality established its own holding company to handle real estate project. [48] The plan for reconstruction included 465 plots, mainly for residential housing, in addition to public spaces and services, such as schools and hospitals. Similarly, accusations were leveled at the possible demographic consequences.

By allowing the destruction and expropriation of large areas, Decree 66 can be used as an efficient instrument for rapid and large development projects that will benefit regime cronies, while at the same time operating as a punitive force against populations opposed to the regime. The development of the residential projects would be carried by holding companies owned by governorates or municipalities, but the construction and management of the projects would be contracted to private sector

companies owned by well-connected investors. The implementation of this law in Syria would serve a number of objectives, including a means to pressure populations living outside regime control by threatening to expropriate their properties in their absence; as a source of enrichment for crony capitalists linked to the regime; and as a carrot to attract capital from various countries that wish to profit from Syria's reconstruction drive. [49].

The Aman Group, owned by rising business figure [Samer Foz](#) with close relations to the regime, announced in August 2017 its contribution to the reconstruction of Basateen Al-Razi area, in the Mazzeh district of Damascus, in partnership with Damascus Governorate and its Damascus Cham Private Joint Stock Company. Aman Damascus, established by Aman group for this project, announced a capital of USD 18.9 million, but there were no details on the respective shares of the partners. Before the deal with the Aman Group, Damascus Cham had established a similar joint-venture with Zubaidi and Qalei LLC owned by Khaled Al-Zubaidi and Nader Qalei, two powerful Damascene businessmen with connections to the regime and whose company Castle Investment was awarded in 2017 a long-term contract to manage the Ebla Hotel, in the outskirts of Damascus, a five-star resort with a conference center [50].

The fact that Samer Foz and Nader Qalei are Sunnis has not prevented them from having very close links to the regime, showing once again the multiple strategies and tools of the regime to constitute a diverse popular basis through clientelism, tribalism and sectarianism.

Similarly to Homs and various suburbs of Damascus, Aleppo and other areas could see the imposition of similar projects. In Aleppo, more than 50 percent of the buildings and infrastructure have been partially or totally destroyed, according to a preliminary assessment of the municipality in January 2017 [51]

Meanwhile large sections of Aleppo's eastern neighborhoods have been forcefully displaced to other areas or

left as a result of the war.

Some inhabitants of Eastern Aleppo have started to come back, but until now remain a minority. Indeed, it was estimated that more than 440,000 internally displaced people have returned to their homes in Syria during the first six months of 2017. In parallel, UNHCR has monitored over 31,000 Syrian refugees coming back from neighboring countries so far in 2017. This is a very small amount considering that more than 5 million refugees have fled Syria, and there are another 7.6 million internally displaced Syrians. The Syrian population has shrunk by an estimated 20 percent. [52]

The investments of private actors are however insufficient to rebuild the country. In April 2017, the cost of reconstruction was estimated at \$350 billion [53]. In addition, there are problems of funding, as Public-Private Partnership (PPP) schemes largely rely on financing from banks, which is clearly unavailable as the total assets of 14 private-sector commercial banks operating in the country reached SYP 1.7 trillion at the end of 2016, equivalent to only around USD 3.5 billion (based on the end of the year market exchange rate). In 2010 they reached USD 13.8 billion. In terms of assets, some of the six state-owned banks are actually larger than their private sector counterparts, in particular the Commercial Bank of Syria. However, these banks have large bad [debt portfolios](#). [54]

The reconstruction therefore needs massive foreign funding, which would probably benefit the countries that most supported the Assad regime, particularly Iran and Russia. In February 2017, the Syrian Minister of Economy, Adib Mayaleh, declared that companies from Iran and other allied countries will be rewarded while European and American companies will first need to have their governments apologize before benefitting. [55]. Following the recapture of Eastern Aleppo, Aleppo Governor Hossein Diyab also stressed that Iran was going to "play an important role in reconstruction efforts in Syria, especially Aleppo". The Iranian Reconstruction Authority publicized in March 2017 the

renovation of 55 schools across the Aleppo province. [56] Iran also had the largest presence at the International Trade Fair in Damascus with more than 40 Iranian companies participating. [57].

Meanwhile in October 2015, a Russian delegation visited Damascus and announced that Russian companies would lead Syria's postwar reconstruction. Deals worth at least \$850m emerged from these negotiations. A Russian parliamentary visit to Syria in November 2016 resulted in Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem reportedly offering Russia firms priority in rebuilding Syria. [58]

The Chinese government, in early August of this year, hosted the "First Trade Fair on Syrian Reconstruction Projects," during which a Chinese-Arab business group announced a \$2 billion commitment from the government for the construction of industrial parks in Syria. [59]

Nonetheless, the level of destruction raises questions if Iranian, Russian and even Chinese capital would be enough. The current absence of main actors such as Western states and Gulf monarchies as willing to invest in Syria poses a series of problems.

However, the issue of reconstruction is also connected to the capacities of the regime to provide stability in the regions under its control and a business environment favorable to investments. This is endangered by two main elements: militias and crony capitalists.

## Militias, Spreading Chaos

Grievances against militias have increasingly become public and outspoken in regime-held areas throughout the country for a while now. Militiamen have been involved in various criminal activities such as robbery, looting, murder, infighting, and especially checkpoint extortion, resulting in higher prices and further humanitarian suffering.

Criticisms have become increasingly

vocal in different areas, especially in the Syrian coast, where residents have repeatedly expressed anger at the silence of local police and security forces toward the rise in crimes, kidnapping and looting by pro-regime militias. [60]

This anger has spread to other areas as well. In September 2016, the local population in regime-controlled areas of western Aleppo city expressed frustrations against government officials due to an increase in the looting of homes by loyalist shabiha groups after residents evacuated the area. Militiamen also looted hundreds of factories and workshops in Ramouseh industrial neighborhood in Aleppo. Fares Al-Shehabi, a member of parliament and head of Aleppo's Chamber of Industrialists, even [complained](#) about the incident on his Facebook page.

The pro-regime Imam of Aleppo's Al-Abara Mosque mentioned the matter during a Friday sermon, explaining that trading stolen products was banned under Islamic law. In reaction, Ibrahim Ismael, a shabiha commander, stated that he considered the stolen items as "war prizes" for people who defended Aleppo. [61].

In May 2017, the Syrian government was trying to cancel levies extorted by regime checkpoints following growing protests from merchants and transporters alike reflecting the exasperation of the population in various areas. Businessmen in Aleppo were increasingly critical of these levies, and lorry drivers outside the city of Sweida closed the motorway linked to Damascus for two hours in protest at the "fees" imposed by the various checkpoints along the road. In mid-May, Zeid Ali Saleh, the head of the Military and Security Committee in Aleppo which groups all regime security branches and militias in the city, finally issued an order forbidding the levying of "fees" by regime checkpoints on lorries transporting goods within and outside the city. [62]. Several days later, the Damascus Chamber of Industry also demanded a similar ban in the capital. [63].

At the same time, in response to this growing unrest, Prime Minister Imad

Khamis [declared](#) that he would ban these practices, but there was ongoing resistance from militias. This situation reflects the fact that as the war is ending in large sections of the country, the justification for these checkpoints is increasingly less valid.

In mid-June 2017 in Aleppo, following a number of militia crimes which were even reported in pro-regime media [64], a major crackdown was launched. The presidential palace sent Lieutenant General Mohammed Dib Zeitoun, head of State Security and one of Asad's most powerful intelligence chiefs, in order to put an end to the militias' lawless behavior. State Security and Air Force Intelligence troops started rounding up popular committee members in the Adhamiya, Akramiya, and Seif Al-Dawla neighborhoods, which resulted in some small skirmishes. In addition to this, the local head of the Baath Party, Fadel al-Najjar, also issued a [decree](#) tightening regulations on the Baath Battalions. [65][

However, there were significant challenges to curb the power of militias on a national scale. According to businessman Fares Al-Shehabi, the [intervention](#) of Bashar Al-Asad was necessary twice to issue orders to high security officials. [66]

The main challenge is that militia leaders are generally linked to powerful security agencies and prominent military officials, thus preventing municipal authorities from acting against them without the support of top-level decision makers.

On July 6, 2017, a large demonstration organized by industrialists and businessmen took place in the industrial zone Sheikh Najjar, denouncing the practices of militias in Aleppo. Demonstrators accused them of killing civilians and deliberately disrupting the return of water and electricity supplies by maintaining their control over services and prices. The protestors also condemned the extortion of money at military checkpoints by notably threatening workers with going to the military service if they did not pay. [67]. Meanwhile, on the road to Aleppo, truck drivers from the regime-controlled towns of Nubl and Zahra

organized another demonstration against the checkpoint levies and the militiamen's violent behavior. They demanded the authorities to remove the checkpoints.

Aleppo was a test for the rest of the country for the regime to prove its capacity to guarantee "stability" for its population, and for Damascus to prove to the international community its capacity to control the areas under its control, and therefore to move forward on the issue of foreign-funded reconstruction.

However, this is only the beginning of a long battle to discipline the paramilitary forces in the country, including local militias such as the National Defense Forces (NDF) and Iran-controlled ones. As argued by a Syrian official in 2013 foreseeing the problem, "after this crisis, there will be a 1,000 more crises" the militia leaders. Two years ago they went from nobody to somebody with guns and power. How can we tell these shabiha to go back to being a nobody again. [68]?"

In summer 2017, lawless and violent pro-regime militias were still spreading chaos and creating insecurity in various regime-held territories. [69]. By the end of August, according to opposition activists, fighters from Nusur Homs, a paramilitary group, refused to be inspected on their way into the city of Homs, instead opening fire on the police patrol and brutally beating a police officer. [70]. Furthermore, the number of checkpoints managed by militiamen throughout the country generally did not decrease, with some new ones popping up, leading to an increase in costs for producers and consumers alike.

Finally, there exist many other security challenges the regime is hardly capable of dealing with. One of them is the probable change in strategy of retreating jihadist groups, such as Hay'at Tahrir Ash-Sham (HTS) and the Islamic State (IS). There will be a shift towards suicide bombings in civilian areas which will also create more instability.



# Crony Capitalists, They Always Want More

The militias are certainly one of the biggest challenge for the regime to restore “stability”, but they are not the only one. The crony capitalists, empowered politically and economically throughout the war, are also to some extent impeding the return of certain bourgeoisie reinvestment in the country, and therefore the creation of a business environment favorable for reconstruction. The regime’s military victories and increasing re-control of large portions of the Syrian territory encouraged Damascus to try to win back investors and businessmen who had left the country because of the war. Damascus’ motivations are based on attracting investment and increasing business activity, while manufacturers decrease the need for imports, a crucial aspect as foreign currencies became very rare.

As a reminder, the closure of many workplaces since the beginning of the uprising in March 2011 led to massive job loss. The economy lost 2.1 million actual and potential jobs between 2010 and 2015. Unemployment in 2016 reached 60 percent, while youth unemployment increased from 69 percent in 2013 to 78 percent in 2015 [71]. The high level of unemployment and higher cost of living encouraged sections of the youth to get involved in the army or pro-regime militias, especially when the salary of a militiaman could be four times higher than a university teacher. [72].

In February 2017, Finance Minister Maamoun Hamdan visited Egypt to meet with the Syrian Businessmen Group “Egypt (Tajammu’ Rijal Al-A’maal As-Suri Bi-Masr) [73], many of whom are manufacturers. He offered them many incentives such as a reduction in customs duties on production inputs, an exemption on all duties on machinery as well as on the sales tax, in addition to a rescheduling of any debt owed to state banks “a law passed in 2015 enables investors to reschedule their debts at relatively

attractive conditions. [74]

Mr Hamdan also announced that the government was providing funds to establish an 8 MW power generating set for the Sheikh Najjar Industrial City in Aleppo as well as completing works on the Aleppo Airport. The investors answered with a list of requests, including a grace period of two years for their debts. They also raised several questions with regards to customs duties and other business regulations. A week after, a delegation of Syrian investors based in Egypt visited Damascus to meet with various government officials. [75]

Crony capitalists did not hesitate to criticize these government measures. A week after the minister’s visit to Cairo, the newspaper al-Watan, owned by Rami Makhlouf, published a commentary piece (“The Egyptian Industrialists”, February 26, 2017) strongly condemning the fact that the investors conditioned their return to Syria to the incentives provided by the government, and that they wished to return “only after the liberation of Aleppo. [76] According to economic news website The Syria Report, this piece aimed to pressure “those in the government that want them back. The mention that they should pay back all their dues, i.e. debt arrears and taxes, is a clear threat to the investors as to what they should expect were they to come back. [77].”

Syrian investors who left Syria during the war were from very diverse backgrounds and operated in a variety of business sectors, but mostly had less powerful connections to the regime. Those located in Egypt, for example, are mostly industrialists in the textile sector; many of them came from Aleppo, meaning from an urban Sunni background; and the origin of their wealth had little connection to their relation with state institutions but was rather based on their capital investment. [78] In a 2016 BIT report, the Syrian Center for Policy Research (SCPR) stated that up to 90 percent of industrial enterprises in the main conflict areas, such as Aleppo, have closed down, while the remaining ones operate at only 30 percent capacity. [79] Consequently, Syrian industrialists had little options to stay.

At the time of the writing, there were no signs of massive return from Syrian industrialists, while the Egyptian regime announced in March 2017 its intention to establish an integrated industrial zone and other facilities for Syrian industrialists in Egypt as a counter initiative against attempts by Damascus to re-attract Syrian industrialists based in Egypt. [80] Many elements certainly prevented the mass-scale return of Syrian businessmen in Summer 2017, but the behavior of crony-capitalists did not contribute to any willingness to come back.

As such, the recent call by Foreign Minister Walid Muallem for an “active economic diplomacy for preparing the right groundwork for the reconstruction phase in service of national interests” and “the importance of prioritizing expatriate contributions in the reconstruction process through enhancing communication and constructive interaction with the Syrian communities abroad” is rather difficult to materialize. This is in fact unachievable without collaboration with crony capitalists and other regime officials.

## Conclusion

Economist Osama Qadi argued that “recovery might takes 20 years, assuming Syria post conflict starts in 2018 at 4.5% growth. [81]” In the current conditions, this seems rather optimistic.

The possible end of the war in the near future does not mean the end of the problems for the regime, quite on the contrary. The regime will have to deal with a series of contradictions and challenges: on one side, satisfying the interests of crony capitalists and militias, on the other, accumulating capital through economic and political stability, while granting its foreign allies the major shares in the reconstruction business. Today, these objectives are rarely overlapping.

The resilience of the regime in its war against any kind of dissent has come at a very high cost, above all in terms of human lives and destruction, but also politically. In addition to the

growing dependence on foreign states and actors, some features of the patrimonial regime have been strengthened, while its authority has diminished. Crony capitalists and militias have increased considerably their power, while the clientelist, sectarian, tribal features of the regime have been reinforced. Therefore, the

absence of democracy and social justice, which were at the roots of the uprising, are still very much present and were even deepened.

However, the absence of an inclusive and structured Syrian political opposition appealing to all popular classes, and of social actors, such as

independent trade unions or peasant associations, that could capitalize on the internal contractions of the regime renders the transformation of various struggles into connected and organized political battles on a national scale, very difficult.

[Syria untold](#)

## Women: a strategic subject

12 September 2017, by **Laia Facet**

We are witnessing a new cycle of international feminist mobilizations and this is something that can be seen especially in this last year. The response to the March 8 call, as well as the replications of the Women's March around the world are something new with respect to recent decades. But also, since the cycle of 2011 we are experiencing a feminization of protest. We saw it in the Arab Spring; we have seen it in mobilizations in defence of the public; in peasant protests in Latin America or in a more particular form in the PAH [Platform for People Affected by Mortgages] in the Spanish State. It's not by chance.

The impact of the socio-economic crisis on women has been widely discussed and analysed. How the disintegration of the welfare state has damaged the living conditions of millions of women who now find themselves at much higher rates of poverty and multiplying their burdens compared to previous decades. How women fill the ranks of the informal and submerged economy. How we continue to put up with living conditions despite capitalism. Women who before 2008 already took on double and triple days and whose conditions have been generalized to increasing sectors of the working and popular classes. Women who bear the burdens of reproductive force inside and outside the home, inside and outside the market, inside and outside employment (formal and informal).

To dispel suspicions, it is not that women constitute a class in itself linked to "the domestic" as some currents of the second wave had argued; the point is that we are a strategic sector of this. Avoiding self-centred identity politics, it is this position in capitalism in general and in the particular recrudescence that we experience that we become a potential strategic subject. Not by a kind of accumulation of oppressions - the more oppressions, the more potential - but through the role of maintaining reproduction (in its broadest sense), which puts us in a strategic position to deploy.

Maintaining reproduction incorporates care, but not only that; it incorporates the domestic but goes much beyond its four walls: the reproductive is also in the market, in employment, in the state and therefore impacts on the majority of women. Most, but not all, women transversally occupy this position. The women of the bourgeoisie, the establishment, the high society, the dominant elites, the state apparatuses do not play that role, although some of them may come to break at critical moments. We, for our part, have accumulated a key experience for the current phase: the welfare state was in itself insufficient.

Why is it a key experience? Feminist economists in the Spanish state have developed extensively on this question, through work such as those of Carrasco, Ezquerro or Orozco and many others, providing a good review

of the limits of what is called the "welfare state"; I will not paraphrase them. I believe that this accumulated experience is key to rethinking an economic, social and political strategy in the crisis phase of capitalism in which we find ourselves. A sort of illusionism has been installed of the return to a golden age of "welfare" that was not such for most women; but which functions as a desirable horizon. Meanwhile, exploitation rates are increasing, proletarianization processes are increasing globally, and the non-formal and domestic economy plays a central role of survival in ever-increasing sectors of the class; something that women in Latin America and Central America know very well.

This periphery in which the welfare state not only did not develop, but also sustained high rates of exploitation and oppression to support the central countries. Two years ago, the comrades from Brazil, listening to the report on the situation in the Spanish state, told us: "you are living through a process of Latin Americanization", a complicated word to pronounce but which indicates a clear trend towards where we are going. We are in a clash between expectations that are not going to be realized in this phase of capitalism and a reality of change of cycle for which there are no socialized and sufficiently matured economic strategies.

A strategy that seeks to undermine the basis of the oppression of half the

population should not only "integrate"; but must rethink social and economic policies in the current framework of capitalism where there is no turning back, nor Keynesian recipes that serve. We are in a framework where the state leaves greater and greater gaps. Gaps in the functions of reproduction that the state had assumed (education, health, social services and so on) and which are currently commodified by being taken over by a market which is exploitative, savage and ruthless towards working women; or reorganizing these functions, enclosing them in the four walls of the house and letting them fall on the shoulders of the women in individual and familiar form.

It is in our hands, the same hands that clean, cook, heal, care, work; the same hands that defend the earth, the public, the community, the bodies; it is in our hands to be able to propose new

ways of organizing work, new ways of relating to nature, new ways of relating between ourselves that pass through common interests, free of phobias of all kinds. We already do this, we organize life, it is us today who sustain and seek those common interests invisibly, marginally and in situations of misery. These hands must be harnessed to organize them collectively by putting those functions at the centre of a comprehensive political and economic strategy. And the interests of women workers, those below, the 99% as the US comrades say, are not only our interests; they are the interests of the social majority, of the class as a whole. Therefore, we keep the potential to organize other institutions that emerge from our struggles, from experiences of feminist and feminized self-organization. Institutions that are at our service, in our power and that resolve the social crisis in a radical way.

That means strategically thinking through our political practice to develop that potential. Because it is precisely that: a potential, which does not have to happen if there are no active and conscious politics. Strengthening and deepening the self-organization of women in all possible areas, not as a matter of political correctness, but as a strategic element. Decentralizing power and delegating it (take it!) into new institutions that meet basic needs. We can look back a hundred years ago and draw lessons from the women of Petrograd who, having endured the misery of war and poverty, erupted on March 8 and were the spark of the February Revolution; but also the supporters of and participants in the strike movement. Indeed, they are not immediate reflections, they are horizons on which to work, on which to route our daily activism so as to cement a strategy of emancipation.

## **The Importance of MAIS for the PSOL in Brazil**

**11 September 2017, by João Machado**

We can say that it allows a qualitative leap forward in the difficult process of reorganizing the Brazilian socialist left. This judgement may seem strange. After all, neither the PSOL nor MAIS are all that big. That is true, but it is the size of the Brazilian socialist left itself that is not very big, if we consider - as is reasonable - that this is made up of organizations that strive to advance the struggle for socialism in Brazil (which excludes the PT and its allies, who have put themselves in a different camp, that of class collaboration with the bourgeoisie and subordination to the existing order). So we are talking about a relative, qualitative change.

The PSOL has well over 100,000 members. However, most of these members are more formal than real. Reasonably optimistic estimates

indicate that the PSOL Congress to be held in early December is likely to involve just under 30,000 members in its local plenaries. Going to such a plenary is a very limited sort of participation, and for many of these members it will be their only participation in any party activity since the last congress two years ago. What is more, most of these are the same members who are active "outside the party", in the social movements or even in the electoral campaigns. So the entry of many hundreds of MAIS militants into the PSOL will thus represent a significant growth in party membership.

Its importance, however, is not restricted to this quantitative aspect. It is worth mentioning an aspect that we can call symbolic. Throughout 2003 it was evident that the Lula

government had accepted the impositions of the "market" and abandoned any perspective of significant social transformation, and that the majority of the PT would bow to this. That is why it was necessary to start discussing the need to build a new party. Members of both the PT and PSTU took part in this debate, as well as others who were members of neither. But only a small part of the PSTU membership took part in the founding of the PSOL. At the time, it was not possible to unify in the new party the sectors on the left of the PT that were willing to do this and the whole of the PSTU - mainly due to different conceptions of the party. The majority of the PSTU did not agree with building a party that had different organized currents within it. Thus, the entry now of the MAIS - an organization that represents a

substantial part of the tradition that formed the PSTU - corrects, albeit in part, this original weakness in the formation of the PSOL.

Another decisive aspect is that the MAIS members, due to their political education and tradition, will represent a very important enrichment of the capacity for programmatic debate and formulation of the PSOL. Another is that most of the members of MAIS are implanted in unions and social movements and, in this respect, they can help the PSOL overcome some of its most important weaknesses. In its trajectory since 2004, the PSOL has been able to develop as a significant electoral point of reference in terms of the socialist left (unfortunately, still very much a minority one everywhere except in the state of Rio de Janeiro). But it has achieved much less presence in the social movements (with the exception of youth movements), in part because of the fragmentation of positions within the party. To be a party rooted in social struggles and to contribute to organizing them, remains one of the main challenges of the PSOL. The members of the MAIS will help a lot to face this.

There are issues where, without a doubt, the MAIS militants have much to learn from other members of the

PSOL or, more precisely, from some of them; perhaps the most decisive is the importance of incorporating an ecosocialist perspective into the revolutionary conception of socialism. On this point, the MAIS's formulations are still limited - but this is also true of the PSOL itself, albeit to a lesser extent.

What we have is a situation in which MAIS is entering a party that faces immense challenges, which it can play a major part in helping to confront. It is in this sense that their joining represents a qualitative leap.

No less important is the fact that the MAIS has said it is joining the PSOL to contribute to and build syntheses and convergences, to "act shoulder to shoulder with all in the PSOL so that, in each battle of the class struggle, we can elaborate together the best policy for the liberation of workers and blacks, women and men, LGBTs, youth, indigenous people, landless people, homeless people and quilombolas." This perspective, which is pluralist rather than self-proclamatory (within a framework of class independence from the bourgeoisie), is one of the keys to advance in the process of reorganising the socialist left. In the same way, it is very important that MAIS has been

giving importance to the unity of the left beyond the PSOL, combining the struggle for the broadest possible united front in defence of the rights of workers and the people against the attacks of the neoliberal right, in other words, the unified resistance of the exploited and oppressed, with the search to build of a united political alternative of the socialist left, with parties such as the PCB and the PSTU, with organizations and parties that have no electoral registration, and with combative social movements.

Finally, it is important to highlight that the MAIS is joining the PSOL at a key moment in the history of the Brazilian people and our party. Of the Brazilian people, because we are suffering a harsh attack on historical rights that were won with much sacrifice; we are struggling to withstand a brutal backlash and to build an alternative, and more unity is paramount. Of the PSOL, because among the setbacks that threaten us is a supposed "political reform" that would make the existence of a party like the PSOL more difficult, for example with the imposition of a "threshold clause." Faced with this threat, the PSOL needs to strengthen itself - and strengthen itself, precisely, by reinforcing the project of a socialist party, that is, with the entry of new fighters like the members of the MAIS.

## Kurdish independence in Northern Iraq: Between hope and contradictions

9 September 2017, by **Joseph Daher**

The vote will not be binding, but will trigger the independence process if the yes votes win. The Iraqi central government, dominated by the Shi'a Islamic fundamentalist movement, Da'wa, and many states in the region, including Turkey and Iran, are opposed to this referendum. At the international level, Russia, the United States and the European Union are suspicious of this poll.

### Opposition from Baghdad

The Iraqi central government in Baghdad denounced the referendum as contrary to the Constitution. The Iraqi government is also opposed to the integration into the future Iraqi Kurdistan of the "disputed regions", particularly those in northern Iraq,

including the multi-ethnic and oil-rich province of Kirkuk, claimed by both the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Iraqi government.

On August 29, Kirkuk Governor Najmuddin Kareem announced the participation of the city in the referendum after a majority of the provincial council voted in favor of taking part. However the vote was far from a consensus, quite the contrary.



Only 24 of the 41 council members attended the vote, with 23 voting in favor of participating in the referendum. One abstained. The remaining council members – all Arabs and Turkmen – boycotted the vote. Instead, they issued statements denouncing the vote as “unconstitutional”.

Iraqi Sunni MP Mohammed al-Karbouli, from the coalition al-Haq (the solution) declared that this decision was “a stark violation of the constitution and a determined move to confiscate the rights of the Arab and Turkmen in Kirkuk. The government should intervene to stop this violation”. On his side, Iraqi Prime Minister Hayder al-Abadi denounced this outcome as “wrong”.

Kurdish peshmarga fighters seized control of Kirkuk in 2014 when the Iraqi army fled from Islamic State’s offensive across northern and western Iraq. Hence, the peshmarga prevented the region’s oil fields from falling into the hands of the jihadists.

The Iraqi Kurdistan region has a population of 5.5 million, of which about 4.6 million are Kurds. This population increases up to 7.7 million if the “disputed regions” are included.

We should remember however that one of the main provisions of the Constitution voted in 2005 stipulates that the central government should organize a referendum in the “disputed regions” before December 31, 2007, in order for the populations concerned to freely decide whether or not they belong to the Kurdistan region. The Iraqi regions populated mostly by Sunni Arabs have also not been able to decide by referendum whether or not they could transform their province into a federated region, in other words with more autonomy.

One of the last links between the KRG and Baghdad was the financial allocation to the Kurdistan region, which accounted for 17% of the Iraqi budget. However, that ceased after January 2014. Since then, Iraqi Kurdistan has been hit by a deep financial crisis. That is not just because Baghdad ended its financial allocation. The decline in oil prices, corruption and clientelism also explain

the economic difficulties. The poverty rate has increased dramatically among the population of the autonomous Kurdish region, while strikes in public services have multiplied in protest against late payment and / or reduction in wages.

Moreover, the region suffered from the military conflict with the troops of the Islamic State and the influx of large numbers of refugees from the invasions caused by the jihadist group.

## **Regional and International Oppositions**

The announcement of the referendum has also sparked opposition from neighboring states such as Turkey and Iran. Ankara and Teheran fear that such a process will have consequences for their own Kurdish minorities, who also suffer from the discriminatory and oppressive policies of these regimes. Turkey, which has excellent relations with the KRG and the Barzani family and is the first investor in Iraqi Kurdistan, denounced the referendum as a “terrible mistake” and reiterated its support for “the territorial integrity of Iraq”.

The United States, Russia and the main European states are also reluctant to support the idea of independence and are in favor of maintaining Iraq’s unity, despite very close relations with the KRG, notably in the fight against the Islamic State. The United States even tried to convince Kurdish officials to postpone the referendum. The Western states would like it to be postponed for several years, fearing that the vote would trigger a new conflict with Baghdad and turn into another regional crisis.

## **A capitalist and corrupt ruling class**

The vast majority of Iraqi Kurds support the idea of independence. Some discordant voices call for the

postponement of the referendum and oppose the political leadership of the KRG which is dominated by the following parties: 1. The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by Massoud Barzani, the son of Mustapha Barzani, a legendary figure of the Iraqi Kurdish rebellion, and 2. the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which is dominated by the former president of Iraq, Jalal Talabani. These two parties have been sharing power for a quarter of a century in Iraqi Kurdistan, despite periods of bloody conflict between them that killed more than 3,000 persons in the 1990s.

Massoud Barzani is nevertheless the strong man of Iraqi Kurdistan. He and his family monopolize a large number of political positions. A U.S. State Department cable leaked by Wikileaks noted that “The KDP consists of family clans, operating very much like a mafia organization. For example, Massoud Barzani’s uncle is Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari, his nephew/son-in-law is KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, and his son Masrur is Head of KRG’s Intelligence Directorate”. Massoud Barzani still governs the KRG despite the end of his official mandate in August 2015. President Masoud Barzani’s term in office actually ended in 2013 after serving two four-year terms and was then extended for two years by an act from the then KDP-PUK dominated parliament.

The political system in Iraqi Kurdistan was suspended in October 2015 after an attempt to turn it into a parliamentary system that would have greatly diluted Barzani’s powers. All other democratically elected institutions were frozen or controlled by the party of the “unelected” president. There are and have been also attacks and actions of repression by the KRG security forces against journalists, activists and political opponents critical of its policies, as well as against protests movements.

Following the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian protests, another political party, the Movement for Change, called for the resignation of the Cabinet and the disbanding of the Kurdistan Regional Government. In February and March 2011 protests against the KRG were violently

repressed, two protesters were killed and several others were wounded. The party Movement for Change (known as Gorran), which played a leading role in these protests and demanded the resignation of the Cabinet and the disbanding of the KRG, was also the target of the repression. The KRG security forces burnt down several buildings belonging to Movement for Change, including a TV and radio station. In October 2015, the KDP imposed a suspension on all Gorran members of government and dismissed the Gorran peshmerga minister and his adviser.

The historical political relations between the State of Israel and the Barzani family must also be condemned. Moreover, in Iraqi Kurdistan, Mossad agents or former Israeli soldiers have been quietly training Kurdish security forces. The KRG has also sold large quantities of oil to the State of Israel in recent years through international trading companies and without the approval of the authorities in Baghdad. In this affair, this oil passed through an oil pipeline to the Turkish port of Ceyhan, on the Mediterranean Sea. Turkey,

allied with the Kurdish government of Massoud Barzani, has facilitated this long-standing affair. Ankara opened an account for Erbil in the Turkish public bank, Halk and stored Kurdish oil waiting for buyers. KDP Peshmerga forces are being trained by Turkish Special Forces in the Kurdish city of Zakho.

On its side, the PUK maintains good relations with Iran and has coordinated its peshmerga operations on some occasions with Shi'a Islamic militias controlled by Iran in the past, notably in Diyala Province.

## Conclusion

It is certain that through this referendum, these two Kurdish parties of the KDP and PUK, intend to strengthen their political and economic power and above all to try to divert popular anger against their neoliberal, clientelist and corrupt management of affairs. There should be no illusions about the emancipatory potential of these parties allied to the various international and regional imperialisms. They also often acted

against the Kurdish populations and political forces present in other countries.

We must nevertheless support the possibility for the Kurdish people in Iraq to decide their own future in total independence, in other words the right to self-determination, including separation from the Iraqi state. It is important, however, that the rights of ethnic (Arabs, Turkmens, Assyrians) and religious minorities (Christian, Yazidi, etc) also be guaranteed in the process of independence.

The right to self-determination for all oppressed people is a fundamental element of their liberation. For decades, this right has been denied to the Kurdish people who have suffered from the violent repression and oppression imposed by the chauvinistic regional states and betrayals of various imperialist states.

Let us therefore support the self-determination of the Kurdish popular classes in Iraq while opposing the bourgeois and authoritarian leadership of the KDP and PUK.

*September 4, 2017*

# **“This generation expresses a feminism that is much more intersectional”**

**8 September 2017, by Laia Facet, Nadia De Mond**

**Nadia, you have been a feminist activist for decades, how does someone with this trajectory see the new cycle of mobilizations?**

What is evident in many countries where there have been mobilizations in the past two years is that we are in a new phase of development of international feminism. Of course, it is not a global phenomenon that affects all countries, but it is no longer limited to a continent or a region. We say that we are in a new geopolitical phase and that we cannot think of continuity, something similar

happening in the feminist movement. After years of small experiences, collectives and struggles, but where it seemed that not much had progressed, in the last two years several ingredients have combined that were not seen before to make a very rich mixture. And there is this new phenomenon. Which is generational, because those who are building these new mobilizations are very young. Of course alongside older activists, but it is generational. Then also, and this is normal, this generation has its own ways of doing feminism. I think every generation appropriates feminism in

its own way. This generation expresses a feminism that is much more intersectional than previously. Very spontaneous, very natural in the less politicized layers, in seeing the continuity of the various oppressions of race, gender, origin and class, of course, that come together in a general malaise that necessitates protest and change.

As for Italy, it is perhaps a challenge for this new feminism to go beyond its social and generational scope. Reaching their mothers, women more integrated in the daily grind of a job.

It can touch these layers, some may have known feminism but have not seen its revolutionary force and have abandoned it; others had never had anything to do with it. But it is clear that this new generation has to make alliances with layers of society which are more moderate, more integrated, quieter. The problem is that women from this generation who are more integrated into the world of work are unfortunately not organized in feminist or women's groups or in unions, so it is not easy to link up with them.

**I was just going to ask you that in this new phase we have seen the presence and visibility of racialized, veiled, transsexual women with an important presence in the mobilizations. We saw it in the Women's March, but in all the mobilizations it has been emphasized. I remember talking to some of my comrades about whether there was an overcoming of the limits of the second wave. How far are we in overcoming them?**

I'm excited about this new wave. But the more bourgeois, more institutional part, is not defeated, it has many ways of maintaining its control and its weight in the women's movement. It has many means of communication, not social media like ours, but the mass ones; women in positions of cultural, political, power and so on, they are there and we will have to confront them still, we have not won the battle. For example, Cinzia Arruza told me that in the United States, part of the initial Women's March tried to silence sectors that called for a strike and a more intersectional and plural, class, racial march ... No, it is not an easy coexistence.

**And what has been the process in Italy? You have had a very strong cycle of mobilizations. You have also succeeded in regenerating the structures of the feminist movement, generating new spaces such as [Non Una Di Meno](#). What has this been like?**

Unexpected. It has been a convergence between a more radical, revolutionary sector of young feminism that had been structured

around abortion in solidarity with the Spanish state, which maintained a feminist assembly structure in Rome. This network ("Io Decido") came together with the women workers of the anti-violence centres who have their own slightly more institutional network -who were directly affected by the cuts and plans of the government - and some other sectors to create Non Una Di Meno, but the response has gone far beyond these initial forces. The interesting thing is that from the beginning street demonstrations and protests have been combined with national general assemblies the day after to discuss in depth all aspects of what is called violence. Violence that includes all forms of oppression and discrimination against women and LGBTBI+ persons. This has allowed the creation of working groups, not only these national mega assemblies of more than two thousand women, but also in large cities. They have been working on content and proposals for action, which has taken almost the entire political year. Now the challenge is to consolidate this great strength. In the last 20 years in Italy there have not been any national feminist structures, everything was very fragmented and localized. So, having maintained this form of national organization is a novelty. The challenge is what perspective to give it.

On the one hand we have the confrontation with the government's plans. But there are different positions between the more autonomous sectors that do not want to get near the government, the section that says: we will go and we will present our positions to weigh with the strength we have, and another section, linked to the coordination of institutional centres, that is more willing to negotiate because they depend on budgets for their survival. So it's a very difficult discussion.

In addition, we discussed here proposing a national annual meeting of feminism, inspired by the Argentine women again, to maintain an occasion for discussion within feminism that starts from this new wave and is not one of these more institutionalized sectors.

**Have you thought about the mobilization of September 28th? What is the abortion question in Italy?**

There will be mobilizations by cities, there will not be a national mobilization, to be closer to what's going on on the ground and in hospitals. The problem of law 194, which is the law that determines the possibility of abortion in Italy, is the question of the conscientious objection clause for doctors, which is extended to all health workers. This means 70% of doctors are objectors and in some public hospitals and some regions the possibility of obtaining a termination is very difficult or very late. But here, there is a discussion. Is our goal to change the law, removing this article from the law; or should we ask that all the public structures must ensure that in one way or another the service is guaranteed. This latter is one position, more pragmatic if you want; the other, which is more political, is more interesting, but if you want to do politics you have to say how you are going to change the law. Within a context in which we have a parliament that is called centre left but is more centre right. In this balance of forces, how are you going to change the law? With the PD being a fusion between the Christian Democrats and the Communist Party, the Eurocommunists, there is not a sufficient balance of forces. There should be a huge mobilization, because the risk is that if they discuss law 194 in this Parliament it will worsen; when in addition, from time to time, the right mobilizes to introduce a legal status for the embryo. It is an argument; but the real threat that pregnancy cannot be interrupted and that we cannot continue this way and that we are against conscientious objection, this is clear and there will be several actions. I think it will be a success.

**This week we are debating the international scenario of the growth of mobilizations, and the situation of global chaos and the rupture of the social pact that has been evidenced by the political crisis ... What role do you think the feminist movement plays? What strategic role can it play in the coming years?**

I see a lot of potential, without denying the difficulties. Together with the phenomenon of the rise of the feminist movement, we discuss the other phenomenon that is the feminized leadership of many other social, territorial, ecological, health, social services, housing movements. Both these things seem to me to

indicate that the emptiness and the paralysis left by the defeats of the left is beginning to be filled by these new forms of mobilization and that if we work well can also modify the ways of doing activist politics. Ways that incorporate an integral perspective of the life of the people in which

sexuality is an issue, but also common ownership, nature and so on. I see a possibility. A new vanguard, I know this concept is under discussion. But these female leaders incorporate a complex of contradictions that can greatly strengthen and be a good basis for the development of new paradigms of change and revolution.

## Social struggles and the birth of a new consciousness

7 September 2017, by **Jean Nanga**

In Cameroon, the financial-economic situation is less critical, despite the fall in customs income following the Interim Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union. [82]. However the current wave of demands for a return to federalism in Cameroon reflect above all a denunciation of social injustice, discrimination on linguistic bases, unleashed by teachers in the Anglophone area against a state under Francophone domination. It seems, unfortunately, that this social dimension has not enjoyed an effective solidarity in the Francophone zone. This could be damaging to the unitary reactions needed to respond the anti-social attacks by the Biya government, even if the coming of an election year will tend to render the ruling faction a little cautious.

In Chad, "sixteen measures" have been announced, some months after the victory at the presidential elections - considered as fraudulent and followed by a ban on public demonstrations - of Idriss Déby, provoked a mobilization of trade unions, citizen's associations and political parties rejecting the popular classes having to pay for the burden of the bad organization of the national economy in general, and the poor management of oil revenues in particular. The fall of the price per barrel of oil and Boko Haram are not sufficient explanations for this movement of opposition. As the

financial situation did not allow the payment of civil service wages from September, leading to accumulated arrears, the teachers unions supported by the students union launched a strike. The march of women from the Union of Chad Trades Unions, planned for November 8, 2016, was prevented by the regime, who had recalled perhaps that the popular demonstrations that brought down Blaise Compaoré had been preceded by a similar march of women. Four months of strikes, during which the teaching unions were joined by the trade unions in health and the judiciary, paralyzing the civil service, all demanding the payment of wage arrears and the pensions of the retired, as well as the withdrawal of the measures concerning them as well as the students, and the liberation of imprisoned activists, followed. In mid January 2017, the strike was suspended for a month.

Two weeks later the vote on a new law, restricting the right to strike, was not recognised by the trade unions, conscious of the relationship of forces in their favour. The unions democratically decided on a one month truce (prolonged by two weeks in mid-February 2017) to allow the government to reflect on other solutions than those of structural adjustment. The refusal by the "Mouvement d'éveil citoyen" ("Citizens' Awakening Movement" - a platform of associations for the

defence of human rights, political parties, independents and so on, created in late December 2016 and supporting the social movement) to respect its banning, announced by the minister of the interior, augurs the type of welcome which will be reserved to the stubbornness of the government in attacking social gains and liberties.

In Gabon, opposition to the fraudulent result of the presidential elections of August 2016 has been bloodily repressed by the Ali Bongo regime, without however managing to crush a people sick of Bongo's grip over the country. Thus, parallel to the mobilisation of the political opposition, the teaching unions in the public sector launched a strike, boycotting the autumn return to school and delaying it by one month. Their union coordination, the "Convention nationale des syndicats du secteur de l'éducation" (Conasysed), on unlimited strike since the return to school, renewed their action in late November 2016. The teachers are demanding the improvement of their working conditions - with the support of the pupils who have, for example, demonstrated in their support in the main towns on February 21st, 2017. How can one teach and learn in classes of one hundred and fifty pupils (from primary to twelfth grade)? A situation which existed well before the fall in price of the barrel of oil.



It stems rather from a contempt for the popular classes, whose children can only go to the public sector schools, from a head of state with other priorities: "For 7 years under the presidency of Ali Bongo Ondimba, successive governments have not built any schools, secondary education colleges or universities whereas over the same period 863 billion FCFA (around 1/3 of the national budget for one financial year) have been devoted to the organisation of sporting competitions". [83] In this period of alleged financial difficulty, the egocentrism of one individual and his court (supported here by the oil company Total, itself with image problems), prioritises sport not only over education but also other important social sectors: "the 463 billion FCFA budget allocation for the organisation of the African Cup of Nations (CAN) soccer tournament in 2017 exceeded the budgets allocated to national education, health and the construction of housing and municipal facilities, which was 441 billion FCFA in 2016... The budget for CAN 2017 remained constant despite the slowing up of economic growth whereas the budgets for priority programmes have all suffered cuts varying from - 6% for national education to - 42% and - 43% for health and agriculture" (idem, p. 28).

Some of these billions have been added to Gabon's public debt. The "Trade Union Unitary Dynamic" involving around forty unions opposed to social injustice and the coming structural adjustment appealed with others for the boycott of CAN 2017. Thus, the opening of this competition took place in a newly constructed stadium which was half empty. This signalled a certain popular determination to not give way to diversion and not to accept paying the bill of a management of national wealth and the state over four decades which has served the scandalous enrichment of one family (Bongo), proprietor of the Delta synergie holding company, the Gabonese

capitalist octopus. The magistrates' union went on strike from November 2016 to mid-February 2017.

## Towards the birth of a new social consciousness?

The first wave of neoliberal structural adjustment favoured "democratisation" in an Africa dominated by single party regimes and appalling social injustices and inequalities. In the area covered by the Central African Economic and Monetary Community, the ruling autocrats have not really been shaken, with the exception of Congo DRC where, after a sovereign national conference, followed by a de-presidentialised transition, the former autocrat was defeated electorally in 1992. But five years later he returned to power, following a war co-financed by France under Chirac-Jospin and the oil company Elf, aided by Angola. A "democratisation" sold by the neoliberal capitalist ideological complex (from the political scientists to the organisations of "civil society" via the international financial institutions) as "market economy and multipartyism" accompanied by a dynamic "civil society" conforming to this definition of democracy. Thus, in this "end of history" ambiance, multipartyism was realised in this sub-region as the coexistence of the autocrat's party with an opposition, in general supportive of the capitalist economy - with sometimes conflictual situations expressing the refusal of an alternation in the control of the "cake".

This consensus on capitalism accentuated capitalist accumulation at the expense of the public treasuries, by the autocratic political-mafiosi factions, and the rise of local capitalists, as factor and expression of the growth of inequalities and of the social injustices denounced during the struggles evoked above. Do these latter, the premises of struggle against

the new wave of structural adjustment, indicate the birth of a new social consciousness among the popular classes opposing the harmful social consequences of neoliberal structural adjustment, and the beginning of a systematic critique of capitalism and imperialism? A new social consciousness opposing not just the local capitalist autocracy but also combating the sub-regional structures of integration of capitalist pan-Africanism (the African Union is currently preparing a continental free trade zone on the model of those existing or being negotiated elsewhere in the world)? A capitalism which, it should always be recalled, given the persuasive force of its machine or its ideological complex - is naturally the producer/reproducer of injustice and social inequality.

The birth of such a new social consciousness among the popular classes would demand the construction of solidarities in action and reflection among the organisations of those classes (rural and urban), of different types, like the Mouvement d'éveil citoyen in Chad or the Dynamique unitaire syndicale in Gabon. Such solidarities can help avoid reproducing the situations post-Ben Ali and post-Mubarak. Solidarities not only in the national space, but also in the sub-region, indeed beyond.

The popular classes and their organizations must build solidarity-based sub-regional responses, rooted in an internationalism (African, global) which is ecological and emancipatory of the exploited and oppressed, to the questions of the CFA franc, the new wave of structural adjustment, the continental free trade zone and the economic partnership agreements with the European Union. [84]

*This is extracted from a longer article in French published in **Inprecor** n° 637/638, mars-avril 2017 "CEMAC : Retour À l'ajustement structurel neoliberal et mobilisations populaires".*

# Choices Facing African Americans

6 September 2017, by **Malik Miah**

"We can no longer wait." What does that imply? Does it mean breaking with the Democratic Party and building a new political party of African Americans – a new Freedom Now Party? Does it mean going all in to try and take over the left of the pro-free market capitalist party? Does it mean mass actions to make the country ungovernable until full equality is the reality?

No answers are given, yet.

To start with, African Americans need to reject the current platform of the Democratic Party establishment to target the "evil" Russia and President Vladimir Putin. If you believe the mainstream media and the Democratic Party elites, the number one issue facing African Americans and all Americans is alleged Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential elections.

While stating that Trump's election was legitimate, the only purpose of this Democratic campaign is to undermine Trump and win elections in 2018.

For African Americans, this campaign against Russia (and North Korea, Iran) is a diversion from more central issues including the right to vote. For years the far right and Republican Party has pushed voter suppression laws. Since Trump's election, his new team of the super-rich has stepped up its efforts to take away votes from Blacks and other citizens.

While liberals focus on Russia, Trump has made big policy changes in federal agencies to undermine health care, public education, environmental regulations, civil liberties and basic civil rights. The Justice Department is seeking to reverse modest changes on drug policies and has given a green light to police departments to make sure Black Lives never matter.

The liberal establishment targets Russia as basic rights for African Americans are suppressed. The Black-focused media also discuss Russia, because many of their owners are part of the Democratic party establishment.

But their readers are more interested in other issues. Most want to know how to stop the racism, police violence and loss of health care, especially Medicaid, and ask "Where are the new better paying job?"

The words from the Movement for Black Lives Platform quoted above are more on target than when written under the first Black president. The optimism about future change will require mass struggle.

## Three Broad Trends

U.S. history since the second American Revolution, the Civil War, when former slaves were recognized as human beings, has been a history of two steps forward, four steps back. We are entering a retrograde period once again where President Trump snubs civil rights organizations like the NAACP. (He refused to speak at the group's 2017 national convention.)

In this context, a discussion on what tactics and strategies to follow in the age of Trump by Black activists is crucial.

There have been and are three strategic visions facing Black activists (and leaders of other social movements and its left-wing supporters) in the age of Trump and whites-first ideology.

First is the liberal electoral approach of seeking to transform the Democratic Party and its entrenched establishment. The aim is running

candidates and using anti-Trump protests to advance that strategy.

The goal is to run more Blue Dog conservative whites. Black women who are the biggest social group backing the Democrats (90% plus voted for Hillary Clinton) complain that the party elites refuse to give them a bigger voice in the party.

Black elected officials (BEOs) are now a bigger part of the leadership base than traditional organizations. They criticize those who focus on protesting the government and corporate policies rather than building the Democratic Party. It is a common theme of Black media pundits on MSNBC and talk radio.

Thousands of BEOs, however, have brought little relief to working class Blacks since the end of legal segregation 50 years ago that allowed a new, better-off middle class to leave urban areas.

The bottom line is that this BEO strategy has been ineffective. There is no firewall against a rising white supremacist Republican Party. Cities like Detroit have more poverty today than 50 years ago.

A second, more radical strategy relies on street marches and protests demanding change. It brings new activists into politics and radicalizes them to consider socialist and anti-capitalist thinking. The goal of this approach (borrowing from the tactics of civil disobedience of the Martin Luther King Jr era) is to win reforms by organizing popular resistance to the Republican Party, Trump and the far right.

It also means generally accepting the Democratic Party as the framework for change. What tends to happen are left wing progressives, running as Democrats, becoming moderates once in office.

While running for office, they subordinate or even oppose the tactics of civil disobedience and mass action. Take the case of Ben Jealous, a former head of the national NAACP and a prominent supporter of Vermont Senator and self-proclaimed socialist Bernie Sanders.

Jealous is running for the Democratic Party's nomination for governor of Maryland. Will he be able to organize public actions as he's done as an activist? Not likely.

In contrast, Rev. William Barber, the former head of the state's NAACP, decided not to run for office. He is continuing his mass protest movement ("Moral Mondays") against the racist and anti-poor policies of the state Republican Party.

The third strategic approach "one with fewer supporters and sharply attacked by liberals" rejects electoralism and the rigged, two-party system. Many of the activists are openly socialist and anti-capitalist. They participate in the social movements but also articulate a long-term anti-capitalist perspective.

Canadian political writer and activist Naomi Klein explains in her new book *No Is Not Enough* that to stand up to Trump, the left must push an anti-capitalist vision within the social movements and build an alternative political movement.

She is correct that mass resistance as a strategy is not enough. Yet Klein like most social movement leaders does not call for a new mass revolutionary party "even if it begins as a core of like-minded militants who are leading social and labor struggles.

**"We Can No**

## **Longer Wait"**

Unlike earlier periods, particularly after the civil rights victory in the 1960s, there is no serious effort to call for or build independent Black or Labor political parties.

In the 1960s Malcom X represented the strongest voice for Black Nationalism and later internationalism with a denunciation of the two-party system and the capitalist system. Groups like the Black Panther Party and others on the left rejected working within the system. This is not yet the case today.

Blacks and others, including organized labor, need an independent class-based party, a new political party that openly challenges the free market system and pushes for stronger government and state action that puts human rights before profits.

Many African Americans and leading activists of the Movement for Black Lives are challenging the Democratic Party establishment for a bigger role in the party. As white-supremacist forces get stronger in the Trump government, it is likely that some of these activists will break with the Democratic Party as occurred in the post-civil rights revolution era in the 1960s and '70s.

The significance of the Movement for Black Lives is a thought-out recognition that the traditional civil rights groups, and their legalistic and electoral strategy alone, aren't working for working class and poor Blacks.

The power of the Movement's Platform and declaration "we can no longer wait" is a road map to move

forward with no preconditions. It argues for the need to resist massively, to make multi-ethnic alliances and to seek a new reality that is not the status quo.

The militant wing of the popular movements should include the socialist perspective in its education for those beginning to radicalize for the first time. Building a new leadership incorporating a socialist perspective is key to building a revolutionary movement.

African Americans as a highly discriminated-against community tend to be the most open to the anti-capitalist and socialist vision. (In the 2016 primaries Blacks did like Sanders' economic plans but saw Clinton as the likely president. Black liberals smeared Sanders despite his long support for civil rights.)

In an address about Palestine and its central place in Mideast and world politics, Australian journalist John Pilger made an observation that is equally appropriate for this discussion:

"For most of the 21st century, the fraud of corporate power posing as democracy has depended on the propaganda of distraction: largely on a cult of "me-ism" designed to disorientate our sense of looking out for others, of acting together, of social justice and internationalism." (An excerpt from John Pilger's address to the Palestinian Expo in London on July 8, 2017)

In the age of Trump and with the failures of liberals to lead a fight back, socialists' support and leadership in the broad social movements and unions, and support for political realignments, is more urgent and possible.

## **The War is at home**

**5 September 2017, by Against the Current Editors**

A question often arises whether Trump is a genuine representative of the aims of the capitalist ruling class in general and the Republican right wing in particular, or a self-centered rogue with serious and potentially dangerous personality disorders. The answer is that he's actually both, and it can be difficult amid the daily "breaking news" frenzy to simultaneously grasp the comical and deadly dimensions of the political situation we face.

It's amusing, of course, when Rex Tillerson and James Mattis have to trail the big twit like pooper-scoopers to assure the world he won't blow it up next week "but the Korea war scare (frankly overblown) crowds out the news of the full-scale social counter-reformation this administration is waging.

This is a war on many fronts at once. It's a war to shrink the electorate, particularly its nonwhite non-affluent sector. It's an especially vicious war on women's health at home and globally, not only on the right to abortion but access to contraception and care during and following pregnancy. It's a war, more generally, on the very idea that health care is a basic human right for anyone. It's a war on the right to public education, led by the billionaire heiress Betsy DeVos.

It's a war on the right of communities of color to live without the terror of police violence. It's a war to expand mass incarceration and resume the worst days of the disastrous "war on drugs." And the fact that the federal judiciary is now being stuffed with rightwing ideologues means that the war on people's rights will long outlast the shambles of Trump's presidency.

It's a war against human rights protections for transgender young people. It's a war to remove as many people as possible, as directly stated by Trump's budget director Mulvaney, from desperately needed federal benefits. It's a war on every form of environmental regulation and basic scientific research on climate change. In fact it's a war on the physical and chemical laws of nature, on the premise that these laws can't do any harm if the population is kept ignorant

of them.

It's mainly a rightwing war, but not exclusively. It's a war, for example "supported by the leadership of both corporate parties" to criminalize boycotts of Israel or Israeli settlements called by the UN or other international bodies (Senate Bill 720). Making such boycotts a federal felony, this bill, drafted by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), would make the First Amendment a dead letter. This has caused some of its liberal and conservative sponsors to rethink their position once they got around to reading what it says. (<http://nym.ag/2eDOXOa>)

### Suppressing the Vote

If the Russians are guilty of everything they're accused of "hacking our election," it rates no higher than third as a threat to democratic process in the United States. The Kobach-Pence "electoral integrity commission" appointed by Trump is no mere vanity exercise to validate his specious claims of mass voter fraud. It is the sharp leading edge of a systematic rightwing drive to permanently suppress the votes of people of color and the poor.

This is an effort to institute nationwide the kinds of voter-suppression ID and "proof-of-citizenship" laws that have been passed in many Republican-stacked state legislatures, along with hyper-sophisticated gerrymandering techniques that are being fought out in the courts. Behind the rantings of the 71-year-old baby in the White House that he really "won" the popular vote, the purpose of this effort is clear to everyone.

The reactionary hacks behind the concentrated drive to wipe out any shred of national health insurance, cripple Medicaid and ultimately destroy Medicare and Social Security, are fully conscious class warriors. They understand perfectly well that there will never be majority popular support for their savage social agenda and that the accidental Electoral College victory of Donald Trump opened up an opportunity that might not come their way again.

They know that permanent voter suppression is the only means to maintain their political ascendance. Their motivation combines partisanship and ideology: they believe in principle that the kind of folks who benefit from government programs for people (not counting military contractors, private operators of prisons, or recipients of corporate welfare, bank bailouts, etc.) really shouldn't be voting and that in practice it should be made as burdensome as possible for them to do so.

In tandem with conscious and systematic voter suppression comes the vast insertion of money into politics, to the point where a single House of Representatives seat can run up a campaign cost (as in the recent Georgia special election) of over \$50 million. And that's only the visible tip of the iceberg of "dark money" spread around by the Crack (Koch) Brothers and corporate lobbies.

Anticipating the possibility that Mike Pence might be installed as president just in case Trump melts down or is forced out, major rightwing donors are putting together a cache of funding for him. These folks know better than to put all their eggs in one basket case.

At the outer edge of lunacy, the Kochs through their American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) are pushing Republican-controlled state legislatures toward an "Article V" convention (34 states are required to set this in motion), to hijack the U.S. Constitution by prohibiting national health insurance and other social programs, enforce a "balanced budget" and other insanities. (See Common Cause, <http://bit.ly/2eE3md5>) ALEC is also pushing a repeal of the 17th Amendment, which would return the election of U.S. Senators to heavily gerrymandered state legislatures.

## It Gets Worse

No "free trade" deal is so horrible, so destructive of jobs, wages and workers' rights, that Trump and his team can't concoct something nastier. The pending "new NAFTA" is likely to incorporate the worst features of president Barack Obama's Trans



Pacific Partnership, as laid out in devastating detail by Ethan Earle in "Trump is Trying to Make NAFTA Even Worse" (In These Times, June 28, <http://bit.ly/2txUGZ2>):

(I)n an act of political judo, Trump is trying to use the same anti-establishment, pro-American rhetoric from his campaign to craft a neoliberal NAFTA renegotiation that will include everything demanded in the recently scuttled TPP... .

A Trump-led renegotiation will mean a strengthening of heinous Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanisms, which allow corporations to sue governments that "infringe" on profit-making opportunities, for example, daring to introduce anti-tobacco legislation... . Meanwhile, "investor incentives" will increase the liberalization of capital flows and lead to the offshoring of many thousands of jobs, in the ongoing global race to find the most exploitative labor conditions possible.

The list goes on. Rightwing state legislatures are passing laws to bar municipal governments from adopting living wage and anti-discrimination ordinances.

Republican leaders might be looking toward Russia-collusiongate as the occasion to turn against Trump if he becomes more of a liability than enabler for their political agenda. But as of now, Trump's (and Pence's) approval ratings, low as they are, still run ahead of those for the Republican Party, or Congress, as institutions.

## Bipartisan Dysfunction

The dysfunction of a broken political system affects both capitalist parties, and the health care crisis illustrates it as well as anything. In fact, the Democrats' dilemma is hardly less acute than what's facing the Republicans. Not only are they virtually powerless in two-thirds of the states; their politics and dependence on corporate financing are crippling obstacles to forging an alternative that can appeal to workers facing a devastating crisis in the U.S.

heartland.

In the wake of Bernie Sanders' insurgent campaign, the pure savagery of the Republican assault and the inadequacies of the Affordable Care Act itself, big chunks of the Democratic voting base are turning to support single-payer "Medicare for All," which is in fact the only real solution for health insurance.

It's now not only figures like Sanders and Congressman John Conyers, longtime single-payer stalwarts, but Elizabeth Warren "who's on the left end of the Democratic establishment, but certainly part of it" coming out for it. But make no mistake, single-payer is anathema to the insurance industry and Big Pharma, and hence absolutely unacceptable to the Democratic leadership of Obama, Pelosi and Clinton.

In the early 1990s, when a grassroots movement for universal health care was on the upswing, president Bill Clinton appointed Hillary to develop a program. The hopelessly complex scheme she devised, with the leading input from the insurance industry giants, crashed and burned, but the movement was effectively sidelined.

Will today's Democratic Party, largely wandering in the political wilderness, play a similar role to derail the growing single-payer movement? If Mitch McConnell finally makes that threatened call to Chuck Schumer to negotiate some kind of "fix to Obamacare," what will Democrats actually bring to the table? Will they peremptorily tell their own single-payer supporters to sit down and shut up, as Hillary Clinton did back in the day and as president Obama did in the debate for the Affordable Care Act?

## Possible Openings

Right now, capital and the right wing are winning the war at home, and there's no point in hiding that reality. Lives and communities are being badly hurt by the social crisis and by deliberately cruel policies, and immigrant families torn apart. But the health care impasse, the incipient crisis of legitimacy of the Trump regime, and the severe internal

problems affecting both corporate parties means that there are real openings for popular "resistance" forces to break out of the stale two-party trap.

This is a moment when large sectors of the population are open to progressive answers, as the growing popular support for single-payer shows. The response to the August 12 Charlottesville killing indicates the latent power of a mass anti-racist movement. And it's not a phenomenon in the United States alone, as illustrated by Jeremy Corbyn's terrific showing in the British election where conventional punditry proclaimed that the Labour Party under his leftwing leadership would be all but wiped out.

While the Republican Party is pursuing the most vicious social agenda since the 1920s "with today's added threat of environmental apocalypse on top of it all" the Democrats are tied up fighting over whether so-called "identity politics" (racial justice and LGBT rights in particular) need to be sacrificed in a "return to the center" in pursuit of supposedly conservative white workers.

Astute activist commentators like Naomi Klein rightly point out that the anti-Trump resistance needs a positive program beyond just saying "No" to the savage rightwing assault. This is precisely why the beginning of a revival of socialist politics in the United States, and the promise it holds, is so important.

A socialist movement fights for the rights of oppressed people and for the needs of the entire working class. It fights against corporate "free trade" that destroys decent-paying jobs and labor rights, and for the solidarity of workers across borders whether they're in the USA or Mexico, Honduras, Philippines or China.

A socialist movement fights for the fastest possible transition from fossil fuels, for the right of Native peoples to keep pipelines off their lands, and for the millions of U.S. jobs that can be created in the conversion to a sustainable economy. It's only a mass socialist movement that can fight for all these things, because it's not tied

to the needs of corporate and finance capital. And it's the only kind of

movement that stands for the expansion and full development of

democracy that the right wing is determined to crush. The time is now.

# Barcelona and Cambrils - Manifesto: After the tragedy of 17 August #anemdeblau: peace, solidarity and coexistence in diversity

## 4 September 2017

We do so to give thanks for the solidarity shown in the response by people who have reacted from the beginning, working for our coexistence in diversity. But we also remember and bear in mind the other victims who suffer the same violence every day, which just this month has affected many other countries besides Catalonia. We especially remember Syria, where half a million people have died at the hands of governmental and non- governmental actors, both local and international. Victims who do not appear in headlines, victims who are forgotten. Many do not die but are trapped at our frontiers. As organisations, platforms and social movements we want to make it clear that these are just as much ours as the victims of Barcelona and Cambrils. We do not draw any difference.

We go onto the street as we have done many other times. We remember the calls of "No to the war" against the criminal invasion of Iraq led by Aznar, Bush and Blair which filled the streets of Barcelona in 2003. Let us also remember so many other protests against military interventions elsewhere, for peace and for the welcoming of refugees and migrants, such as that of 18 February. So we will return to the streets, to point out once more the causes and those responsible.

We protest to denounce the hypocrisy of political leaders and representatives, the Spanish government and the monarchy. Those who, with their policies, promote wars and foster armed conflicts, by selling arms to countries like Saudi Arabia

and Qatar, as well as imposing repressive anti-terrorist policies that only worsen the spiral of violence. Those who breach their commitment to give asylum, as the EU Member States do. Also those that promote hatred, racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia, with the worrying collaboration of much of the media. Those who stop and search our neighbours on the street because of their skin color and imprison them at the Centres for the Internment of Foreigners (CIEs). Those who evict our neighbours or who violently repress people's mobilisations. We protest to say "No Pasarán" to the groups that threaten to take us back to a terrible past, and against those who allow fascism to act with impunity. It's time to repeat the call of "your policies, our dead".

We protest because it is a chance to put us to the task of rethinking the model of coexistence and society that we are building. We are concerned about the consequences in the medium and long term. There have already been signs of hatred, racism and xenophobia, and the Muslim community has been criminalised. It is not a question of "them and us", but of all of us together.

For all these reasons, we demand that the response to Thursday's barbarity is not more repressive "security": more vigilance, more frontiers, more police, more arms, more violence. Barcelona and Catalonia must be an example of a different response: based on peace, human rights, solidarity, social cohesion and global justice. It is in this sense that civil society is on the

street today. Our diversity makes us richer and stronger. And today, more than ever, we must reaffirm our commitment to an open, welcoming society that will not allow any ideology of hatred to take hold in Catalonia.

And we also demand a clear and decisive response by our leaders: comply with the agreements and treaties on arms trade that you have signed; respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; break your agreements with opaque and authoritarian governments; stop military interventions; now more than ever open the borders to welcome the people that flee from tragedies like that of Catalonia, people who are now trapped at our borders; demand that companies comply with respect for human rights in other countries, terminating any contracts signed if necessary. The best strategy for preventing violence is the work of civil society.

From organised society, from below, we commit ourselves to working for peace, human rights, diversity and global justice. We go out into the street because, in the face of racism and Islamophobia, in the face of any violation of human rights, we are committed to coexistence. For that reason we protest on Saturday and we will go dressed in blue, #anemdeblau.

Your policies, our dead

Peace, solidarity and coexistence in diversity

Signatories::

ACAPS-GIRONA	ASSOCIACIÀ“ DE DONES LA FRONTISSA	COMERÀ# DE MAR DE VILANOVA
ACCIÀ“ SOLIDÀ€RIA IGMAN	ASSOCIACIÀ“ DE JOVES ESTUDIANTS DE CATALUNYA (AJEC)	Comissió Catalana d'Ajuda al RefugiatCOMISSIÀ“ GENT GRAN 15M
ADMAC	Associacio Eccit	Comitè de Solidaritat À’scar Romero
AGERMANAMENT SENSE FRONTERES	ASSOCIACIÀ“ ESPORTIVA LLAGUTS VILANOVA I LA GELTRÀš	Comunitat Palestina de Catalunya
AHEAD - ASSOCIACIÀ“ D’EDUCADORS I EDUCADORS EN DRETS HUMANS	ASSOCIACIÀ“ HÃ`LIA, DE SUPORT A LES DONES QUE PATEIXEN VIOLÃ`NCIA DE GÃ`NERE	Congreso de los pueblos colombia capitulo BCN
AIGUA ÈS VIDA	ASSOCIACIÀ“ INTERCULTURAL LLATINS	CONSELL NACIONAL DE LA JOVENTUT DE CATALUNYA
ALIANZA CONTRA ANTIGITANISMO BCN	ASSOCIACIO INTERCULTURAL NAKERAMOS	COOPERACCIÀ“
Alternativa d’Esquerres El Prat	ASSAMBLEA NACIONAL CATALANA	COORDINADORA EN DEFENSA DE LA SANITAT PÃšBLICA MATARÃ“
ALTERNATIVA INTERCANVI AMB POBLES INDÃ GENES	ASSOCIACIO PEL DESENVOLUPAMENT DEL RIU SENEGAL	MARESME
AMICS DE L’ ARCA	ASSOCIACIO PER LA INSERCIO SOCIAL I LABORAL (ISIL)	CONF A VC
AMPA ESCOLA MEDITERRÃ€NIA DE VILADECANS	Associació Senegalesa “Diappo Ak Teranga” VNG	COORDINADORA UN ALTRE MÃ“N ÈS POSSIBLE SABADELL
ANTICAPIT ALISTES	AV DE ROCAFONDA - L’ESPERANÃ#A -CIUTAT JARDÃ - MATARÃ“	CORRENT ROIG
Ara o Mai	AV DE ROCAFONDA - MATARÃ“	CRIDA CONSTITUENT
ASiA-Associació Salut i Agroecologia	BARRIS REFUGI	CRISTIANISME AL SEGLE XXI
ASOCIACIÀ“ ENTREPOBLES	CALALA FONDO DE MUJERES	CRISTIANS PEL SOCIALISME
Asociacion de Amigos de la no-violencia	Campanya DESMILITARITZEM L’EDUCACIÀ“	CUIDANDO (ASSOCIACIO SOCIOSANITÀ€RIA)
Asociación EQUIT-MGF (Equipo de sensibilización contra mutilación genital femenina) Asamblea de Cambrils	CANDIDATURA D’UNITAT POPULAR-CRIDA CONSTITUENT (CUP-CC)	DESMOS OPCIÀ“ SOLIDÀ€RIA
Asamblea de Cooperació per la Pau	CASA NOSTRA, CASA VOSTRA	DESPERT APROFES
Asamblea de Joves de Cassoles	CATALUNYA NI CETA NI TTIP	DIOMCOOP COOPERATIVA
ASSEMBLEA DIVERSITAT FUNCIONAL DE BARCELONA	CENTRE D’ESTUDIS AFRICANS I INTERCULTURALS	DOLORES ENTIENDE
Asamblea Naciona de Joves Independentistes	CENTRE DELÃ€S D’ESTUDIS PER LA PAU	DONESXDONES
ASSOCIACIÀ“ CATALANA PER LA PAU	Centre Internacional Escarré per les Minories Ã`tniques i les Nacions (CIEMEN) CIEMEN	EDUALTER
Associació Cultural Sobiranista de Castelló de la Plana.	COL.LECTIU REFEM EL DIRECCIONAL	ENGINYERIA SENSE FRONTERES
ASSOCIACIO D’AMISTAT AMB EL POBLE DE GUATEMALA	COLÃ-LECTIU I+	ESQUERRES PER LA INDEPENDÃ`NCIA
ASSOCIACIO D’ATURATS RIPOLLET i CERDANYOLA		FAGIC- Federació d’Associacions Gitanes de Catalunya
		FARMAMUNDI
		FAVB
		FEDERACIÀ“ CATALANA D’ESCOLTISME I GUIATGE

Federació d'Ecologistes en Acció de Catalunya	ORGANITZACIONS PER A LA JUSTÀ CIA GLOBAL	Refugiades Calafell-Stop Mare Mortum
FEDERACIO NTERCOMARCAL GARRAF-ALT PENEDES DEL SINDICATO DE CGT Federaci3n de Cofrad3as Sufies	Llagostera Solidaria	REFUGIARTE (ASSOCIACIO SOCIOCULTURAL)
FOTOMOVIMIENTO	LLIGA DELS DRETS DELS POBLES	SAFI (Stop als Fenomens Islamofobs)
Francesc Matas Salla	LLUITA INTERNACIONALISTA (LI)	secretarias de Pastoral Gitana de Barcelona
FUNDACIÀ AKWABA	MAREA BLANCA DE CATALUNYA	SECTORIAL de SERVEIS SOCIALS ANC
FUNDACIO KALILU JAMMEH	MARX21	SERVEI CIVIL INTERNACIONAL DE CATALUNYA
FUNDACIÀ MIGRA STUDIUM	MARXA MUNDIAL DE DONES	SI
FUNDACIÀ ROCA GALÀS	METGES DEL MON CATALUNYA	SINDICATO POPULAR DE VENEDORES AMBULANTES DE BARCELONA
FUNDACIÀ SOLIDÀERIA FLAMA	NOVACT Institut Internacional per a l'Acció Noviolenta	SINDIHOGAR/SINDILLAR
FundiPau	NUTRICIO SENSE FRONTERES	SOARPAL (Solidaritat Arb3cies-Palacagüina)
Gorka Mart3n	OBSERVATORI DEL DEUTE EN LA GLOBALIZACIÀ - ODG	SOCIETAT CATALANA DE LLIURE OPINIO
GRÀCIA PARTICIPA	Observatori Guinardó-CanBaró en defensa dels serveis p3blics i dels drets socials OCASHA-CRISTIANOS CON EL SUR (ZONA DE CATALUNYA I BALEARS)	SOS RACISME CATALUNYA
GRUP D'ESTUDIS POLITICS	ÀMNIOUM CULTURAL	STEI Intersindical (Illes Balears)
Grup de Solidaritat Oscar Romero de Terrassa.	ONG ENTREPOBLES PALLARS	STOP MARE MORTUM
GRUP IMPULSOR DEL PARLAMENT CIUTADÀ	PAPERS I DRETS PER A TOTHOM	Stop Mare Mortum Garraf
H.I.J.O.S.BARCELONA	PLATAFORMA EN DEFENSA SANITAT P3BLICA BAIX VALLES	SUDS - Associaci3n Internacional de Solidaritat i Cooperaci3n
IAC (Intersindical Alternativa de Catalunya)	PLATAFORMA ATUREM LA GUERRA	SURT. Fundaci3n de Dones
Institut de Drets Humans de Catalunya	Plataforma Aturem la Guerra Mollet	TAMAIAVIURE SENSE VIOLENCIA
INTERSINDICAL VALENCIANA	Plataforma de Solidaridad con Guatemala de Barcelona	TANQUEM ELS CIE
INTERSINDICAL-CSC	PLATAFORMA EN DEFENSA DE LA SALUT I LA SANITAT EL PRAT DE LLOBREGAT PLATAFORMA PEL DRET A DECIDIR DEL PV, DECIDIM	Taula Aigua de Mollet
IRIDIA - CENTRE PER LA DEFENSA DELS DRETS HUMANS ITACAT - Agència de Comunicaci3n Intercultural	PLATAFORMA PELS CAMINS ESCOLARS VNG, CIUTAT EDUCADORA	TAULA DE L'AIGUA DE TERRASSA
JERC	Plataforma per la Pau Lloret	TAULA PER MEXIC
JUSTICIA I PAU E IDENTITAT AMB LA CREACIO ORDRE SANT AGUSTI CATALUNYA JUSTÀ CIA I PAU GIRONA	POBLE LLIURE	teixint vincles
L'Aurora (om)	PREMIÀ ACULL	TERNE ROMA ACTION BCN
LA RODA DE LA PAU SABADELL	PROCÉS CONSTITUENT	UNADIKUM CATALUNYA
LA SECCIO SINDICAL CCOO PRIMARIA BARCELONA CIUTATLA XIXA TEATRE LAFEDE.CAT -	RefugeESuoc	UNITAT CONTRA EL FEIXISME I EL RACISME
		Unitat contra el Feixisme i el Racisme al Garraf
		UNITAT MUNICIPAL 9



# Between Judges and Generals

3 September 2017, by **Farooq Sulehria**

A coup in Pakistan's checkered political life is never news. However, [Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's](#) disqualification from his post on corruption charges through a court verdict on July 28 has an element of newness about it. Instead of the Pakistan Army, the recent coup has been carried out by country's top judges.

In the case of previous coups d'état, Pakistan's military would spearhead the overthrow. A pliant judiciary would unabashedly justify it by providing a legal cover. As an institution, this judiciary has prostituted itself. Top judges have legitimized every military coup and refused to hold generals accountable. Recently, the judiciary let former dictator General Musharraf slip abroad so that he could escape legal prosecution "and possibly a death sentence" for participating in a coup and thus violating the country's constitution.

The judges have obstinately refused to hold the military generals accountable whenever the men in khakis were caught misappropriating the public funds or abusing their authority. Every time judicial accountability begins with the corrupt politicians and ends there. While the Sharif dynasty "which was founded in the 1980s by the military itself to counter the Bhutto dynasty" is fundamentally corrupt, the judiciary's selectiveness means the July 28 court verdict to disqualify the outgoing prime minister technically for lifetime lacks any credibility whatsoever.

Pakistan's Political Show

An industrialist with conservative social and political outlook, Sharif began his political career with the military's blessing. His personal wealth and political career flourished in a reciprocal manner. After serving as the chief minister of the Punjab province, largest of country's four provinces, he managed to defeat [Benazir Bhutto's](#) Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in the 1990s snap elections. That the elections were rigged in his favor by the military is a fact acknowledged by the country's Supreme Court.

Once in the prime minister's office, he wanted to expand his official powers the way he had expanded his industrial empire. This led to a conflict with the General Headquarters (GHQ, the central headquarters of the Pakistani army) in 1993, which inspired the generals to work with his rival Benazir Bhutto to initiate a mass agitation to oust Sharif from power. In generally fair elections, Benazir Bhutto staged a comeback but before long her second government was dismissed by the military through various machinations. Every dismissal was justified through an anticorruption discourse.

A fresh round of general elections, marked by low turnout, in 1997 returned Sharif to power with a two-thirds majority. He promptly appointed his younger brother, Shahbaz Sharif, as Punjab's chief minister. Ever since, Sharif's son-in-law, nephew, daughter, and other relatives have occupied positions of power in the parliaments and the apparatus of Sharif's party, the conservative [Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz](#) (PMLN).

During his second term, he attempted to establish an Erdogan-style Islamified dictatorship. Privatization was not merely accelerated; privatized industrial units were handed down to Sharif family cronies. He moved Pakistan closer to Riyadh while cultivating close personal relations with the House of Saud. But he made a mistake: initiating a peace process with India, which annoyed the military. On October 12, 1999 he was removed and imprisoned under the command of General Musharraf. Later, along with three-dozen family members, he was exiled to Saudi Arabia, most likely on the intervention of Saudi monarchy.

He wouldn't be able to return until after Musharraf had been swept aside in 2008. That year, he participated in general elections, but did not obtain a majority due to the wave of sympathy for the PPP after Benazir Bhutto's assassination in 2007. The PPP, now led by Bhutto's widower, Asif Ali Zardari, formed the government in 2008. However, PMLN managed a majority in the Punjab parliament and Sharif's younger brother Shahbaz Sharif formed the provincial government. As the PPP government discredited itself through utter inefficiency and phenomenal corruption, Sharif's political fortunes rose in a contradictory manner.

PPP's growing unpopularity meant that Sharif was inching close to the prime ministerial slot, which he regained in 2013. However, disillusionment with the PPP and Sharif's rise in fortunes did not translate into an involuntary expanding support base for the PMLN. Rather, a party known as Pakistan

Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) headed by former cricket star Imran Khan, and backed by a growing support base in the Punjab and tacit military patronage, emerged as PMLN's rival in the Punjab.

The PTI, like PMLN, had participated in the anti-Musharraf agitation known as the [Advocates Movement](#), and drawn to its ranks an emerging layer of middle classes uninspired by both the PPP and the PMLN. This layer consisted of doctors, engineers, lawyers' fraternities, and professionals of various kinds. Unlike Sharif's base of traders, conservatives, and peri-urban lower middle classes, Imran Khan's support consists of what academics fashionably describe as "aspiring middle class." Politically, it is conservative. However, it is more articulate, metropolitan, and increasingly assertive through mainstream and social media. It wants a share in politics, upward social mobility, and views the working classes with contempt.

While the Sharif dynasty and the PMLN, through the networks of patronage, have incorporated sections of disorganized subaltern classes, PTI supporters view these patronage networks as forms of corruption. Hence, PTI's main platform has been an anticorruption discourse. When the so-called [Panama Papers](#) were leaked in 2015, they contained the names of Sharif family members as the holders of offshore companies. Seizing the opportunity, the PTI moved with the Supreme Court against the Sharif family, including Nawaz Sharif.

Imran Khan, in fact, [alleged](#) that the PTI was approached by a Supreme Court judge, Justice Khosa, to file a petition against Sharif's corruption. Consequently, an investigation team was formed by the court "a team that featured a military intelligence agent. Finally, on the pretext that Sharif did not declare his sources of

income on his 2013 election papers "a constitutional violation" he was disqualified from holding office. The military, circumstantial evidence suggests, ensured the desired verdict.

But why a judicial coup, rather than a military one? There are a number of reasons, but most importantly (1) a military dictatorship was humbled by a mass movement only a decade ago, while urban middle classes providing the spine to the Advocates Movement still have hopes in the democratic process as they believe that their party, PTI, will constitute the next government; (2) given the economic situation, [electricity crisis](#) (eight-hour long power cuts on daily basis have become a routine), high joblessness, staggering inflation, and the policy of supporting the Taliban will imply a direct responsibility by the military for all these crises and their solutions; and (3) the GHQ is not in White House's good books owing to Pakistan Army's meddling in Afghanistan. Presently, the civilian government cushions the Pakistan military against the US pressure while taking the heat for deteriorating socio-economic conditions. The military would like to continue such an arrangement.

And what is the motive behind the July 28 judicial coup? Nawaz Sharif supporters claim that his attempt to reconcile differences with India and an "anti-establishment" posturing has annoyed the country's all-powerful military. Sharif's close confidant and cabinet minister, Saad Rafiq, has also implicitly blamed Saudi Arabia, pointing to the Sharif's government's refusal to dispatch military troops to aid Riyadh's war on Yemen and its neutrality in the recent Qatar-Saudi dispute. With some qualification, these claims appear credible.

However, the actual reason is the military's visceral abhorrence for democracy. Pakistan can be

characterized as a praetorian state where the military has emerged as a key economic, political, and ideological hegemon.

Since the institution of civilian rule, there have been attempts to hold the military accountable. Bans on a range of trade unions and professional associations have been lifted. What's more, the PPP government amended the constitution to decentralize federal powers, benefiting small provinces. And there's more space for free media. The military likely saw these changes as strengthening democracy at the cost of their own power. In the civil-military equation, a strengthening democracy is likely to tip the balance in the favor of civilians. Hence, the judicial coup.

What next? During the brief spells of democratic experiences in Pakistan, an elected civilian government constitutes the de facto opposition. Sharif's party will continue ruling as his younger brother, Shahbaz Sharif, presently Punjab's chief minister, [will replace him](#). (A corrupt brother replacing another corrupt brother will be a slap in the face World Bank- and PTI-style anticorruption discourse that center-stages the importance of "clean individuals" to rid the system of corruption instead of looking into the structural causes).

General elections are scheduled in a year's time. The military will continue with its judicial coup piecemeal. Its goal is will be concluded with the Sharif family's ouster from the power corridors. However, without rigging the elections, such a conclusion will not be possible. Therefore, in the absence of progressive, pro-people alternatives, the present political show will go on, with Pakistani workers caught between neoliberal but elected politicians and an antidemocratic military and its judicial handmaidens.

[Jacobin](#)

## "Having America Care About You Is Not

# Necessarily a Good Thing"

## 1 September 2017

The war in Afghanistan is already the longest in US history, spanning sixteen years at a price of at least \$1 trillion. As a private citizen, Donald Trump repeatedly condemned the US occupation of Afghanistan, but today, his administration is preparing to send several thousand additional troops. Meanwhile, conditions for Afghan civilians continue to deteriorate.

Two journalists who have spent years covering Afghanistan – Anand Gopal and May Jeong – spoke to Eric Ruder about the aims of the US war in Afghanistan. Gopal has reported from Iraq, Afghanistan, and other Middle East war zones for various publications and is the author of the award-winning *No Good Men Among the Living: America, the Taliban, and War Through Afghan Eyes*. Jeong is a Kabul-based magazine writer and a visiting scholar at the New York University Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute.

Eric Ruder : **The May 31 bombing** in Kabul targeting the city's diplomatic sector is being reported as perhaps the most deadly bombing since the US occupation began in 2001. Can you talk about how we got to this point?

Anand Gopal : I don't know if it's the biggest mass-casualty incident, because there have certainly been many occasions when the Americans have killed more people in a single attack – up to 150 or 200 or more. However, it is one of the bigger bombs placed by the insurgents. The Taliban is probably behind this, though we don't know.

It's interesting to contemplate why they would do this. People are dying all the time in very large numbers outside of Kabul and in the countryside, and nobody really pays attention. So if the insurgency puts a bomb in a place like Kabul, it signals to the West, to the Americans, that the country is not secure.

The roots of the **daily chaos** that is Afghanistan today lie in the conflict between US-backed forces and an anti-state insurgency made up of the Taliban and allied groups. The various warlords, militias, and so forth backed by the United States probably amount to one hundred thousand to two hundred thousand armed men – and then you have perhaps fifty thousand Taliban and associated people on the other side.

The people who are predominantly dying in this war are the people who are caught between those two sides. They're dying because of roadside bombs, air strikes, American-backed militias abducting people – all of these things. Every year, the number of **civilian deaths** tends to be higher than the year before. Every year breaks a record, from 2001 onwards, and that trend is continuing.

The thing is that the elites – the ruling class in Afghanistan as well as the American elites – value lives in Kabul more than they value lives in the hinterlands, because of the symbolic value of Kabul. I think the Taliban recognizes that, so they try to kill people in Kabul.

May Jeong : I've been living in Kabul since January 2013. When I first moved there, people were talking about district centers potentially falling, and the implication was that this would be an apocalyptic event. And then district centers did start falling in 2014.

I remember that one district center in Zabul fell, and the government responded by relocating the district center and saying it never fell. There are a lot of workarounds like that.

Of course, the conflict between Taliban and Afghan forces is really a proxy struggle because they are both being funded by other countries. The United States is behind Afghan

government forces, and Pakistan supports the Taliban, but then there are other elements as well. For example, Russia is also arming the Taliban because it wants the Taliban to serve as a bulwark against ISIS. Iran is involved as well.

In 2015, Kunduz, which is the provincial capital of Kunduz province, fell to the Taliban, and Afghan forces retreated.

In 2016 and 2017, a lot of provincial capitals have fallen in all but name. Today we don't hear about spectacular attacks as we did in Kunduz because that was such an emblematic moment. Since then, the government has implemented a lot of stopgap measures.

A lot of Americans and Canadians have been deployed to defend Kandahar, for example, but the only reason the city hasn't fallen is because the police chief, Abdul Raziq, runs the urban capital as if it's a police state. It's very safe, as long as you don't come from the wrong tribe or find yourself in the wrong district.

In the neighboring province of Helmand, for example, the capital city of Lashkargah is really under siege. Of the thirteen districts in Helmand, a majority of them have now fallen to the Taliban. There are American soldiers and Special Forces who are commuting from Bagram Air Base about four hundred miles away by helicopter every day, fighting on the front lines and then returning home because they don't even have a base there.

The same thing is happening in Uruzgan, which is north of Helmand – where in many of the outlying districts people run out of food or medical supplies, and they have to negotiate their way through areas that are contested.

If an area is securely with the government or with the Taliban, life is easier, but it's the contested territories that are problematic. And those contested territories are drawing closer to the urban centers, which is why we're hearing about them.

So I've been living in Afghanistan in an era when cities are falling, and cities falling has become normalized in a way that it wasn't when I first moved there.

Eric Ruder: Trump is now flirting with the idea of a [US troop surge](#) in Afghanistan, which sounds reminiscent of the surge that Obama campaigned on and carried out. By comparison, Trump's surge seems moderate â€” the number of troops appears to be a fraction of what Obama sent.

Anand Gopal: I think Einstein said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing again and again, and expecting different results.

We had a surge in Afghanistan in 2009 from Obama, and it failed. The insurgency is still there â€” in fact, it's stronger now than it was before. The military folks and the proponents of the insurgency say it failed because US troops didn't stay there long enough, and if only they get to stay longer this time â€” I don't know, maybe they're thinking fifteen or twenty years â€” then things will change.

But I think that misunderstands fundamentally the nature of why there's an insurgency. It's not just a purely military question. The reason why people are fighting in Afghanistan is because they have real grievances regarding violence from US-backed warlords, dispossession, desperate economic circumstances â€” a whole host of things. And the armed insurgency is what gives expression to those grievances.

That's why even if you negotiate with the Taliban, and they're mollified somehow, there will be another group with a different name that is willing to fight â€” unless those fundamental political problems are dealt with.

The surge in 2009 didn't do any of those things. What it did was kill a lot of Taliban and create a lot of militias. I think the number of armed men in Afghanistan increased dramatically under Obama's watch, so there are militias in every village.

With so many people under arms fighting on behalf of the Afghan government, it's possible to create a semblance of security, but in reality, it just creates more grievances and fuels further conflict.

So I think we should expect the same thing from a potential Trump surge â€” fueling further conflict. Which, by the way, is what the United States has been doing since 2001. They have been supporting one side to the hilt and blocking any attempts at peace from the beginning until now.

May Jeong :It looks like Trump's surge is going to go ahead. People are calling it a mini-surge, which I think is a misnomer, because even if they send 5,000 troops, it doesn't really amount to a surge compared to the 140,000 that were there during the Obama years.

The Afghan elite, the urban residents, the media â€” these are all the same interest group, and they are typically the ones lobbying in Washington. While they obviously aren't monolithic in their outlook, many support the surge because they have benefited under the NATO occupation of Afghanistan. They want more than five thousand troops, and they would be fine with troops staying there forever.

There are about eight hundred US military bases around the world, and I think something like two have been closed in recent years â€” which is to say that when America establishes a base somewhere, it's not looking to close it. In the Philippines, the United States has a [military base](#) with a hundred-year lease. Likewise, after the Korean War, the United States said it would leave after five years, but it's [still there](#)

So the United States plans to maintain its military presence in Afghanistan for a long time, and this has traditionally benefited people in urban centers who speak English and have

access to markets because of their language skills and connections. If you talk about people who have truly reaped the benefits of the war economy, I would venture to guess that it's about one hundred families who have really prospered.

Eric Ruder :So who's against more US troops?

May Jeong: I think the dominant sentiment in rural Afghanistan is feeling stuck in between hostile forces, so I sometimes wonder if the role of ideology and other beliefs is overstated. It seems that the most pressing consideration is simply how to get by.

It's not like people are standing with the Taliban on ideological grounds â€” or that they support the United States on principle because they believe in women's rights. It's really about getting by, and it goes back to my point about how the contested territories are the ones that beget more suffering.

The dominant emotion expressed to me by the people I've talked to in my reporting is one of fatigue. At this point, people don't care which side wins so much as they want the war to be over.

For them, and for myself as well, the point I can't quite get over is that ending the war is essential for women's rights or community development, but for some reason, we seem to be obsessed with microlevel projects, without thinking about how the prerequisites for those happening don't even exist.

Large sums of money have been spent on countless gender initiatives in Afghanistan. And that's great if you're a woman who's been empowered by that, but if you're an empowered woman in an area that is being shelled, that doesn't really help your sense of personal security or sense of wellbeing.

Eric Ruder :So what does the United States want in Afghanistan? The American public is continually told that the United States is only there to fight terrorism and bring stability. Yet it seems that the US presence itself



makes stability impossible. If that's the case, the only possible conclusion is that the United States is fine with instability, so long as it can continue to pursue its imperial interests, using Afghanistan as a platform for its military hardware.

Anand Gopal : I think the ideal end state for US foreign policymakers would be a client regime that generally manages American interests without having a major US military presence. They would like to ideally keep a few bases there. Iran is next door and China is nearby, so having bases is important.

Before, there were grand plans about energy pipelines crisscrossing central Asia, but I don't think any of that is realistic. Really, it's about having a client regime in place, military bases, and a place that's good for American business. That's the ideal. But they're unable to accomplish even that, and that's a pretty barebones minimum.

If you compare US interests in Afghanistan to the Middle East, they're starkly different. US interests in the Middle East are at a much higher order than Afghanistan.

But the United States has found it difficult to secure even this critical set of interests because by its very presence, the United States is the primary source of instability in the country. So the very client regime that they hope to have in place, the rump state they are propping up, is actually what's fueling the insurgency against the warlords and militias that the United States is aligned with.

In a way, I think that Afghanistan is the epitome of the [neoliberal state](#). There's almost no state there; everything is outsourced in the country to private actors, especially security. This is not a recipe for stability.

So you have a case where they have a political/ strategic drive to have a minimal state, and the reality on the ground is that this creates real grievances and causes people to fight back. So they're kept there for this reason.

May Jeong :So you think the bomb was

sending a message to Americans, not Afghans?

Anand Gopal: In my view, the Taliban recognizes that there are only two parties in Afghanistan that matter "that's the US and Pakistan.

So everything they're doing is directed in one way or another toward that because whatever message they're trying to send to Afghans doesn't need to be sent by a bomb because they're in Afghan villages, they're embedded in the Afghan community and in Afghan society. The message they're sending is to the real power brokers in society.

May Jeong : My take on the bomb was that one aspect of it is about sending a message to Afghans, saying: your government can't protect you. But if that's true, it gets back to Eric's question "namely, how does this kind of attack connect to the movement's larger goal? What is that larger goal, and how do these attacks link up to whatever it is that they want?

Eric Ruder : Are they seeking state power? Is it something else?

Anand Gopal : It's a divided and factionalized movement, and there are different wings within it. But generally, yes, I think they're trying to take power. I think there are people who realize this aim is impossible at the moment, and so there are debates about what's practical now and in the longer run.

Eric Ruder :You were saying the two main actors that the insurgents are addressing are the United States and Pakistan. Can you talk about the Pakistani dimension to what's happening in the region?

Anand Gopal : Pakistan supports the Taliban and supports the insurgency, while taking [massive amounts](#) of military aid from the United States.

But the Taliban is deeply divided on Pakistan because it recognizes that it can't be an independent force as long as it's under Pakistan's thumb. So there are a lot of attempts by factions within the Taliban to get out of Pakistani influence, to get other regional powers to support them, such

as Iran, Russia, and China.

But Pakistan is a malign actor in Afghanistan. It's seeking to have representation in the Afghan government in a way, and it sees the Taliban, or factions of the Taliban, as the best chance to that end.

May Jeong: If the United States pulls its funding out, we know what will happen next. After the [Soviet-backed regime](#) lost its funding, that led to civil war, which led to all the other things. So will that happen if America pulls out? In other words, even if it makes sense in the long term to pull out, how do you address the short-term consequences?

Anand Gopal :Yes, if America cuts its funding, the state would collapse tomorrow. So first of all, we should say that pulling out troops isn't the main issue. They have enough proxies that you could pull out the troops, but if you cut the funding, it's very different.

But the thing I would say is that you can argue for wanting to pull out, together with a negotiated settlement for peace, but America is the biggest force blocking a peace settlement in Afghanistan today.

May Jeong :In what way?

Anand Gopal : In every way. It has repeatedly arrested people who have tried to switch sides. It's backing one side and demanding that the other side surrender its weapons and give up unconditionally, which is not a peace negotiation.

Let me turn the question around: the United States has extraordinary leverage on its client regime to force it to come to the negotiating table because it controls the purse strings. If the United States turns off funding tomorrow, the government collapses, right? So the United States could do that if it wanted to. They just don't want to, they don't care.

May Jeong : But their logic right now is that we just need certain wins before the time is right to push for peace negotiations.

Anand Gopal :But that's entirely bogus. That's what they've been

saying for fifteen years. If they wanted to organize a peace tomorrow, they could do it.

As evidence of that, when the [presidential elections](#) took place in 2014, the Northern Alliance, which is allied with the United States, was threatening a coup because they opposed the election results. Then-Secretary of State John Kerry went there and stopped the coup cold. He called them together and headed it off. Because this isn't a sovereign state, these aren't independent actors.

May Jeong :What about when they say that we can't have a negotiated settlement right now because we just haven't amassed enough political capital yet? The logic is that if the United States negotiated peace now, they would have to agree to more power-sharing with the other side than they'd like to, so it's better to keep fighting.

Eric Ruder: Yes, that's the central issue. They keep saying that, but they're continuing to hold out for a victory that they can't achieve. This leaves the US stuck in a place it can't get out of.

Getting out is the equivalent of defeat, and since no one's actually beaten them yet, they can continue on. But the United States can't defeat the forces they're up against, because every "victory" engenders more resistance. That's why some wars, like the US war in Vietnam, drag on for more than a decade and kill a couple million people, until the United States is compelled, one way or another, to acknowledge that it actually lost.

May Jeong: US National Security Advisor [H. R. McMaster](#) is a fascinating character because he makes Trump palatable in a way. And whatever you feel about him, he served as a high-level officer in Afghanistan, which is more than you can say about most other people in the Trump administration. And he's pushing for a surge of three thousand to five thousand troops. Why?

Anand Gopal: McMaster thinks that what the United States did in Iraq worked, except that then the United

States withdrew its troops *too quickly*. So their actual logic is that the troops just need to stay longer " in Iraq and Afghanistan.

May Jeong: But if you follow that logic, why bother with five thousand?

Anand Gopal: I think it does follow logically. Because if you thought the troop surge was working in 2010 and 2011, then Obama came along and decided to pull the troops out in 2014 " we just didn't have enough time. The problem, according to this line of argument, is that we sent the Taliban the wrong message, which was that you can just wait us out.

Eric Ruder: May, are you saying that you think if they were following their own logic, they'd be putting in fifty thousand troops instead of five thousand?

May Jeong: Yes, they should send ten thousand instead of five thousand, right?

Eric Ruder: That's why I asked the earlier question about what the US goals are. I think they know that they're not going to achieve stability " that stability is more than they can really hope for. And if that's true, then they don't want to overcommit.

If you overcommit, you're putting in more troops and money, and raising expectations that you're going to get results, while burning through tons of political capital in the process. So why not just continue at a much lower troop level that won't achieve stability, but keeps the United States in the game?

Anand Gopal: Right, and you can create the feeling that you've done something. You've put in five thousand soldiers, and that's fine. I think they would like something more than that, but they're not willing to do what would be needed, because the cost of trying that is much greater for them. So they're happy to just let the status quo continue.

Eric Ruder: What has changed or stayed the same since Trump took office?

May Jeong: The Trump administration's policy review is ongoing. They had a deadline of April 30, and then another deadline before Trump's big international trip at the end of May, and now they're saying that there will be a decision by July.

That's pretty telling. It probably means that there's a lot of discord within the administration about which path to take.

Eric Ruder: One possible explanation for the continued delays is that they don't want to be seen as continuing Obama's policy, given how Trump savaged everything about Obama's foreign policy, but there really aren't any changes they can propose, because in the end, the Obama administration was pursuing a policy that the Trump administration largely agrees with.

May Jeong: That could be. Generally speaking, there aren't sharp differences over foreign policy in the American two-party system. I can't really tell what distinguishes the Obama-era policy and a Trumpian approach to dealing with Afghanistan.

The way that people talk about Trump and Afghanistan is very peculiar. A lot of Afghan elites were ecstatic when Trump won, for the obvious reason that they thought there would be a reinvigorated US intervention there. But there's also a sense that Trump is bringing in a lot of people who understand Afghanistan, so this will be good for them.

But having America care about you is not necessarily a good thing.

Afghanistan is currently in a situation that would be considered an optimal state " *as far as the US is concerned*.. Sending five thousand troops doesn't cost very much, and then they can let the war continue, while they appear to be "trying their best." And Afghanistan can continue as a client state firmly within the US orbit. That's convenient for the two groups who have power " the Afghan elites and the Washington establishment.

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