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## Nothing is Right in the Middle East Shattered

by ANDRE VLTCHEK

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There is nothing, absolutely nothing right in the Middle East these days. There seems to be no hope left, and no fervor. All that was pure was dragged through filth. All that was great here was stolen or smashed by the outsiders. Enthusiasm had been ridiculed, then drowned, or burned to ashes, or shattered by tanks and missiles.

Corruption thrives – corruption that inundated this entire region since the early days of Western colonialism, and then was sustained through the present-day imperialist global regime.

The land of the Middle East is tired; it is crying from exhaustion. It is scarred by wars. It is dotted with oil wells and rotting armor vehicles. There are corpses everywhere; buried, turned into dust, but still present in minds of those who are alive. There are millions of corpses, tens of millions of victims, shouting in their own, voiceless way, not willing to leave anyone in peace, pointing fingers, accusing!

This land is where so much began. Europe was nothing, when Byblos and Erbil stood tall, when a fabled civilization was forming in Mesopotamia, when Aleppo, Cairo and Al-Quds could only be rivaled by the great cities of China...

And this is where greatness, progress, decency and kindness were broken and bathed in blood by the crusaders, and later by the colonialist scum.

Europeans like to say that this part of the world is now 'backward', because it never experienced renaissance, but before it was broken and humiliated; it went much farther than renaissance, following its own way and direction. A primitive and aggressive medieval Europe took most of the knowledge from here.

All this means nothing now. Almost nothing is left of the glorious past. Grand Arab cities, once exhibiting their fabulous socialist concepts, including public and free hospitals and universities, even several centuries before Karl Marx was born, are now choking in smog, polluted, with almost nothing public remaining. Everything is privatized, and corrupt monarchs, generals and mafias are firmly in charge, from Egypt to the Gulf.

People wanted to have it exactly the opposite way. After the WWII, from North Africa to Iran, they were opting for various socialist concepts. But they were never allowed to have it their own way! Everything secular and progressive was smashed, destroyed by the Western masters of the world. And then came the second wave of semi-socialist states: Libya, Iraq and Syria, and they were bombed and destroyed as well, as nothing socialist, nothing that serves the people is ever allowed to survive in the 'third world' by Washington, London and Paris.

Millions died. Western imperialism orchestrated coups, sent brothers against brothers, bombed civilians and invaded directly, when all other means to achieve its hegemonic goals failed.

It created, it 'educated' a substantial layer of cynical servers of the Empire, the layer of new elites who are accountable to the governments in Washington, London and Paris, and treat their own people with spite and brutality. This layer is now ruling almost entire region, is fully backed by the West, and therefore there is extremely difficult to remove it.

Recently, at the "American University" in Beirut, one of the local academics told me "this region is doomed because of corruption". But where did corruption come from, I wondered aloud. One after another, secular and socialist leaders in the Arab world were removed, overthrown. The Empire put the lowest grade of thugs, the most regressive monarchs and dictators, on the thrones.

The truth is, like in Africa, the people of the Middle East lost all hope that they could ever be allowed to elect the governments that would defend them and represent their interests. They sank to bare 'survival mode', to extreme individualism, to nepotism and to cynicism. They had to, in order to survive, in order to make their families and clans to stay afloat in the world forced on them by the others.

The result is atrocious: one of the most advanced civilizations on earth was converted into one of the most regressive.

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And as a result, there is bitterness, humiliation and shame in the entire Middle East. There is an unhealthy, unnatural mood.

The thugs in Beirut, Amman, Erbil, Riyadh and Cairo are driving their shiny SUV's and latest European sedans. New and newer luxury malls are offering top designer brands for those who make huge profits from the refugee crises triggered by the Empire, or from the crude which is being extracted by mistreated migrant workers. Humiliated Southeast Asian maids, often tortured, raped and abused, are sitting on the marble floors of the shopping centers, waiting for their masters who are engaging in unbridled food and shopping orgies, spending money that they never had to work for.

Collaborators are extremely well rewarded, for serving the Empire directly, for keeping business rolling and oil wells pumping, for staffing the UN agencies and through them providing legitimacy to this grotesque state of things, for brainwashing local youth in West-sponsored schools and universities.

All this is extremely hard to observe and to stomach, unless one is on a certain 'wave', immunized and indifferent, lobotomized, resigned to this state of the world.

The Middle East is of course not the exception – it is just a part of what I often describe as the 'belt' of client states of the West; a belt that winds from Indonesia through almost the entirety of Southeast Asia, then via the sub-Continent and the Middle East, down to Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda.

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Now Saudi Arabia is bombing Yemen. It does it in order to give full support to the outgoing pro-Western regime, and in order to damage Shi'a Muslims. Recent Saudi actions, as so many previous actions by that brutal client state of Washington, will open the doors to terrorism, and will kill thousands of innocent people. Shockingly, that is probably part of the plan.

I am now constantly invited to talk shows and radio and television interviews, to speak on the topic. But what more could be said and added?

The horrors of Western, Israeli, Saudi and Turkish aggressions (direct and indirect) are repeating themselves, year after year, in various parts of the Middle East. People are killed, many people, even children. There are some protests, some accusations, some 'noise', but at the end, the aggressors get away with everything. It is partially because the mass media in the West is twisting all the facts, again and again, and it does it extremely successfully. And most of the Arab media outlets are taking Western propaganda directly from the source, feeding it to their own people, shamelessly.

It is also because there is no effective international legal system in place that could punish aggressors.

The UN is nowhere to be found, when the acts of real terror are committed. Once in a while it is 'concerned', it even 'condemns' aggressors. But there are never any sanctions or embargos imposed against Israel or the United States, even Saudi Arabia. It is understood that the West and its allies are 'above the law'.

This sends powerful signals to the rulers of the Middle East. The Egyptian military, which killed thousands of poor people right after it grabbed the power in a 2014 coup (which is commonly not defined as a coup, there), is now once again 'eligible for US military aid'.

Fully prostituted Egyptian elites danced on the streets of Cairo when the coup took place, as did the elites in Chile, in 1973. I saw them, when I was making a documentary film for the South American Telesur, a film on how the West derailed the Arab Spring. They were posing for my cameras, cheering and hugging me, thinking that I am one of their handlers from the US or Europe.

Recently, I found an Egyptian UN staffer staring threateningly into my face:

"A coup?" she whispered. "You call it a coup? Egyptian people don't call it a coup."

How would I dare to argue with such a respectable representative of the Egyptian nation? I noticed that the pro-Western Egyptian elites love to pose as 'Egyptian people', as those species that are far removed from their mansions and chauffer-driven limousines.

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There are tens of millions of people displaced in this part of the world. They come from Iraq and Syria, and from Palestine. There are new refugees and decades old refugees. Now, most certainly, there will be millions of Yemeni refugees.

In Lebanon alone, 2 million Syrian refugees live all over the place, some renting huts and houses, others, if they can afford it, leasing apartments in Beirut. But the UN and local authorities do not even register hundreds of thousands of them, those in Bekaa Valley and elsewhere. Refugees told me that many of them get turned away. If there is no registration, there are no food rations, no education for children and no medical care.

I saw refugees from several Iraqi cities, in Erbil, in Iraqi administered Kurdistan. They were escaping from the ISIS, which were created by the West.

A nuclear scientist Ishmael Khalil, originally from Tikrit University, told me: "All that I had was destroyed... Americans are the main reason for this insanity – for the total destruction of Iraq. Don't just ask me, ask any child, and you will hear the same thing... We all used to belong to a great and proud nation. Now everything is fragmented, and ruined. We have nothing – all of us have become beggars and refugees in our own land... I escaped five months ago, after ISIS devastated my university. And we all know who is behind them: the allies of the West: Saudi Arabia, Qatar and others..."

Then I stood by what was left of a bridge, connecting the two shores of the Khazer River, just a few kilometers from the city of Mosul. ISIS blew up the bridge. A few villages around it were flattened by the US bombing. A Kurdish colonel who was showing me the area was proud to mention that he was trained in the UK and US. It felt like total insanity – all forces united in destroying Iraq, had the same sources: the US, the NATO, and the West!

A few kilometers from the frontline were oil fields, but local people said that oil companies were just stealing their land; nothing was coming back to local communities. As the flames of the oil refineries were burning, local people were digging out roots and herbs, in order to survive.

And there was a camp for Syrian refugees, too, nearby. But refugees were screened. Only those who expressed their hatred for the President al-Assad were allowed to stay.

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Beirut is symbolic to what is happening in the entire Middle East.

Once glorious, the city now ranks near the bottom of quality of life indexes. With basically no public transportation, it is choking, polluted and jammed. Electric blackouts are common. Miserable neighborhoods are all around. Education and medical care are mostly private and unaffordable to the great majority. Dirty money propels construction of expensive condominiums, posh malls and overpriced restaurants.

Luxury cars are everywhere. Expensive condominiums, yachts, vehicles and designer clothes are the only measure of worth.

It is all thoroughly grotesque, considering that there are 2 million Syrian refugees struggling all over this tiny country. There are old Palestinian refugees in depressing camps. There are the hated and discriminated Bedouins, there are the abused Asian and African maids...

“Work is punishment”, says local credo. Nobody bothers to work too much.

There is plenty of money, but most of it does not come from work. Huge amounts come from drugs, from ‘accommodating refugees’, from business in Africa and elsewhere, from remittances of those who work in the Gulf.

Israel is next door. It is threatening, and periodically it attacks.

Hezbollah is the only large movement in the country that is fighting for social welfare of the people. It is also fighting Israel whenever it invades. And now, it is locked in an epic battle with ISIS. But it is on the terrorist list of the West, because it is Shi’a, and because it is too ‘socialist’ and too critical of the West.

In Beirut, everything goes. The rich are burning their money like paper. They ride their luxury cars and bikes without mufflers, run people over on pedestrian crossings, and never yield. They are mostly educated in the West and trilingual (Arabic, French and English). They commute back and forth to Europe as if it is a next-door village.

The need of the upper classes to show-off is all that matters in Beirut.

The poor – the majority of the Lebanese people – do not exist. One never hears about them. They are irrelevant.

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Those who rule over the Middle East are corrupt, cynical, and unpatriotic.

And they are scared, because they know that they have betrayed their own people.

The more scared they are, the more brutal are their tactics. I see them in action, in Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq and elsewhere.

Most of the left-wing movements and parties in the Middle East were destroyed, bought or derailed. Politics are about clans and religious sects and money. There is hardly any ideology left. There is no knowledge about Venezuela and Ecuador, China and Russia. The poor people love Russia, because “it stands against the West”, but there is very little understanding of the world outside the Middle East and the old colonial master – Europe.

Nothing feels right in the Middle East, these days.

New reports are coming in, alleging Israel of interrogating, torturing young Palestinian children.

Yemen, that ancient land with which I fell in love with from first sight, many years ago, is bleeding and burning.

Two cradles of civilization – Iraq and Syria – are totally torn to pieces, devastated.

Libya is breaking apart, most likely beyond repair, absolutely finished as a country.

Egypt is once again squeezed in an horrendous military grip.

Shi’a people in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia are suffering great discrimination and violence.

People are dying; people are displaced, discriminated against. There is no justice, no social justice for the majority, the same scenario like in Indonesia, like in sub-Continent, like in East Africa, like everywhere where the Western imperialism and neoliberalism managed to have their way.

The West worked very hard to turn the Middle East into what it is now. It took centuries to transfigure this culturally deep and great part of the world into the horror show. But it is done!

The rest of the world should watch and learn. This should not be allowed to happen elsewhere. The “Southeast Asia – East Africa Corridor” is what the West wants to convert entire planet into. But it will not succeed, because there is Latin America, China, Russia, Iran, South African, Eritrea and other proud and determined nations standing on its way.

And the Middle East, one day, will stand up, too! The people will demand what is theirs. They will demand justice. Recently, they tried but they were smashed. I have no doubt that they will not give up – they will try again and again, until they win.

