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TITOLO/TITLE: Failed States and Failure of Change? Self-Criticism within the Arab Spring Experience

PROPONENTE/I – PROPONENT/s: MOHAMAD MOUSTAFA ALABSI

LINGUE/LANGUAGES: English – French - Italian

ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):

Failed States and Failure of Change? Self-Criticism within the Arab Spring Experience

To challenge the stereotype of 'Chaos & The Middle East', our panel is proposing the discussion of notions that seem to be historically and theoretically unresolved and that belong to many fields' literature as History, Political Sciences, Philosophy, Law and many other social and human sciences.

The couples of Legal/Legitimate, Revolution/Civil War, Majority/Democracy, Regime/State can all contribute to a better understanding of the historical and political crises that characterize the modern political experience of the region, especially since the Arab Spring.

Therefore, the Arab Spring events have showed the fragile borders between opposite and related notions

- Revolution and Civil war

Rather than derived or transformed into a civil war, a Revolution should seize the sovereign institutions of the State and replace their ideology whether by a legal and institutional functioning or by a new political hierarchy and organization. Any revolutionary act that splits the institutional and sovereign power of the State is *de facto* a situation of civil war, until the sovereign central power recovers or the new entities are recognized as new and independent States.

As showed at the killing of the Libyan dictator Muammar al-Gaddafi, institutional justice as a revolutionary project was overwhelmed by revenge and individual action. To what extent have Arab activists, media and intellectuals been aware of any difference between Revolution and Civil war? To what extent does the pacific/militarized choice constitute today a topic of debate among Arab elites? what historical and political lessons are to be learnt more than 10 years after the Tunisian moment?

- Regime and State:

Nationalistic speech and sentiments dominated the Arab World for the whole second half of the 20th Century. It's also fair to say that different wars and defeats against the State of Israel have all but sharpened the tendency toward violence in the region. But the most extremist version of nationalism, ideology and propaganda was those of the One-Party State Regime in Iraq and Syria under the Baath rule. In Iraq, the supreme legal and political nom, the Constitution, was temporary and never finalized in, mostly because of the

Kurdish question, the danger of military coups and the rule of the state of emergency. In Syria, the constitution as the supreme legal and political norm of the State stipulated the Syrian State to be a temporary entity, deprived from his historical legitimacy, and that the unifying of the Arab world was the supreme norm of the whole existence of the Syrian State. In article 8 of the 1973 constitution, the Syrian constitution also stipulated that the Baath Party was the leader in the State and in society, which created a confusion between Regime and State and could lead to the disintegration of the State once the regime is broken. This is what literally happened in Iraq after the 2003 invasion and what's happening to some extent in Syria after the arrival of Bashar al-Assad to power.

After the failure of Arab Nationalism, is it wise and methodologically relevant to support new ethnical States (Kurdish states), or accept new ideological speeches (Islamism)?

How Arab societies and elites are thinking today the Palestinian question and the Arab-Israeli conflict?

- **Self-determination between legality and legitimacy**

In the Middle East, the principle of self-determination is not only a right, a norm or a solution, it's also a methodological problem. The denial of ethnic minority rights (Palestine and Kurdistan), or the denial of their cultural and territorial existence is a compelling reason to question the legitimacy of the region territorial formula (Iraq – Syria and Israel). Or, lack of territorial continuities between Kurdish populations or between Palestinian populations would better be answered by a territorial *statu quo* that would preserve current States. But such a proposition is only conditioned by the building of pluralistic regimes and democratic societies and States.

How these constituent issues have been addressed, whether by slogans or in practice, during the Arab Spring agitation? How have they been shaping for long decades under Arab nationalism domination and rule? Is it too late to talk about pluralistic and democratic states?

- **Toward the failure of law and order? The end of the sovereign State?**

From legal and State theory standpoints, a situation of chaos is a situation of civil war. But the situation of the Middle East could be worse, because of the failure of the change movements and because of the armament of some of many of them. The disintegration of the national armies in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, as well as the presence of non-State armies as Hamas, Hezbollah, Kurdish armed movements etc. suppose an almost impossible return to a normal -legal-situation where armed forces are structured and hierarchized. As the 'pre-State situation' is defined by the constituent power and its leading to a legal order, the "post-State" situation could be described as a situation of no-law. The spread of refugee-cities in Jordan, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Northern Iraq, as well as the recurrence of migration and humanitarian crises constitute further additions to this landscape. How Arab elites -intellectuals, academics, journalists, artists- are practicing self-criticism and how would they write the history of the last decade, the last century and the relationship between them.

- **Majority and Democracy**

Even in Middle Eastern States where constituent elections were held (Egypt, Tunisia, Turkey), there was confusion between Majority and Democracy. The constituent power cannot follow the majority rule, because the latter is a principle of government and electoral life, not a principle of creation of

constitution. For example, the controversy in Egypt about the constitutional referendum proposed by the Islamist president Mohamed Morsi (2012) participated in the abortion of the Egyptian revolution and democratic path. This case should be taken as a speaking mistake of confusion between Majority and Democracy and should be taught as anti-revolutionary and anti-constitutional.

From any interdisciplinary approach or any discipline that is related to the notions mentioned above, papers and propositions are expected to deal with the Arab Spring experience and events with critical perspective. The discussions cannot be limited to the last decade events and would be extended to their roots into the past and their consequences for the future. The Middle Eastern States included in the discussion won't be limited to Arab States, they can evoke the political patterns of Iran and Turkey and their influence throughout the region before and especially during the Arab Spring.

The panel will last 2 hours during which 3 to 5 participants will present and discuss their papers. Each presentation will last from 15 to 20 minutes following the number of participants.

**Propositions will be accepted in English, French and Italian. A paper of 1500 words to be sent to: safi.alabsi@lilo.org
For any further question you can write to safi.alabsi@lilo.org**

PROFILO ACCADEMICO DEL/DELLA/DEI/DELLE PROPONENTE/I – SHORT BIO OF PROPONENTS

Mohamad Moustafa Alabsi is a Syrian researcher in Political Philosophy from Grenoble-Alpes University/France. His Ph.D. research grew in the lights and darkneses of the Arab Spring events and outcomes. Hence, he focused his observation and study on the theoretically unresolved relationship between Revolution & Civil War, between Regime & State and between Violent & Civil Change. Dr. Alabsi argues that Arab Spring stalemates are yet to be challenged and that their positive and negative lessons are yet to be discussed and analyzed. He considers that despite the pessimistic realities in the current Arab World, the appearance of human rights' vocabulary and democratic ideals represents by itself a historical turn and a revolutionary moment in the modern historical experience of Arab Societies and political literature. Therefore, Academics and intellectuals from inside and outside the region must seize this priceless opportunity and build on it a concrete project of knowledge and then of change.

Dr. Alabsi is currently a post-doctoral fellow at Columbia Global Center/Amman under the Mellon Foundation Program for Displaced Scholars. He's also member of the New University of Exile Consortium in New York and academic instructor at Off-University in Berlin

INDIRIZZO/I EMAIL/EMAIL ADDRESSES: safi.alabsi@lilo.org