

# Middle East Solidarity

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# SUDAN RISES

## 'We are no longer scared of death'

Sudanese activists speak out as the uprising spreads

## British universities scramble for profit

Middle Eastern regimes are wooing investment

## Four thousand years of Palestine

Historian Nur Masalha speaks to Miriam Scharf about his new book

## The new battle for Afrin

Turkish-backed Syrian groups are reshaping the town's economy. Sami Hadaya investigates.

## Israeli election rivalries explained

Netanyahu and Gantz compete over attacks on Palestinian rights





## **'My Revolutionary Year' by Annabelle Sreberny**

In 1976 Annabelle Sreberny moved to Tehran with her Iranian husband, Ali. She witnessed first hand many of the events leading up to and during the revolution of 1979, which saw mass mobilisations topple the Shah's autocratic regime. To mark the 40th anniversary of the revolution, she has published many of her photographs online.

Go to [www.myrevolutionaryyear.com](http://www.myrevolutionaryyear.com) to browse this unique collection and read her account.

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# Contents

## Cover story

### 11 Sudan rises

After thirty years of dictatorship and war, people across Sudan are on the streets demanding change. Irang Bak analyses the roots of the current uprising.

### 13 'We are no longer scared of death'

Fatima Joda reports from the frontline of protest in Khartoum

### 14 'We want to see an African Spring'

Dr Sara Abdelgalil of the Sudan Doctors' Union in the UK calls for solidarity

## Features

### 18 UKHE Plc: Universities scramble for Middle Eastern markets

Anne Alexander and Alice Finden explore how repressive regimes in the UAE and Egypt are set to benefit from universities' overseas expansion while Ioana Cerasella Chis reports on how trade unions are challenging college managers' drive to put profit before people.

## First person

### 4 Four thousand years of Palestine

Historian Nur Masalha talks to Miriam Scharf about his new book

## Analysis

### 15 'This regime has a phobia of revolution'

Egyptian activist Taher Mokhtar analyses the military dictatorship's strengths and weaknesses.

## News reports

### 7 Yemeni workers strike back

### 8 YouTube hit triggers repression for Moroccan cultural association

### 9 The new battle for Afrin

## Campaign reports

### 23 Giulio Regeni and Egypt's disappeared remembered

### 24 Activist reinstated by Dudley Council after false antisemitism claim

### 25 'No war, no warming': protest hits BP's exhibition sponsorship

## Campaign guide

### 26 How you can support the Sudanese revolution; Egyptian executions

## Background briefing

### 28 Israeli election rivals stoke regional tensions

## About us

Events in the Middle East often dominate the news, but it is war, sectarian violence and western military intervention which grab the headlines.

Middle East Solidarity shows a different side to the region.

We report on resistance to repression and imperialism from Morocco to Yemen, covering the strikes and protests which are missed by the mainstream media.

We carry the voices and stories of the women and men who are still fighting for bread, freedom and social justice to new audiences.

Our practical guides to campaigning and resources for activists aim to build a stronger solidarity movement.

Middle East Solidarity is a joint project of MENA Solidarity Network, Egypt Solidarity Initiative and Bahrain Watch, and is supported by funding from UCU, PCS, NEU - NUT section and a number of Trades Union Councils and local trade union branches.

Find out more here:

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# 4000 years of Palestine

A new book by **Nur Masalha** grounds Palestine in a rich complex history: multi faith, multi-cultural and multi-layered. He spoke to **Miriam Scharf**

**What were your aims in writing this history?**

The teaching of Palestinian history and Palestinian education have been fragmented. Palestinians in the West Bank generally followed a Jordanian *tawjihi* curriculum—although the Palestinian Authority has introduced changes. Gazans followed Egypt, and the Israelis have imposed a curriculum on Palestinians inside the Green line which, when it comes to the history and geography of Palestine, basically aims to “de-educate” them.

My ultimate objective is to produce history textbooks for Palestinian children, students, as well as academics. So much is myth and propaganda. It’s important not to begin Palestinian history with the modern conflict

which distorts everything, making an Arab-Jewish division which is absurd if you look at the long history of Palestine and the Near East.

There is so little understanding of the peaceful living together of many communities with different religions and fluid identities in this region. I also wanted to produce a straightforward fact-based account and get away from myths and propaganda.

**It was fascinating to follow the changing place names, or toponyms, in Palestine. Why did you place such emphasis on this?**

Naming and renaming of places reflects their history. In the ancient past this affected cities and towns more than villages. The Israeli state project of settler-colonisation and Hebraisation erases indigenous history. Israeli renaming projects followed several methods: using a new Hebrew word which sounds the same as the original Arabic name but has a different meaning, or just taking the Arabic name and putting it into Hebrew letters.

My grandmother’s village Endur, depopulated and destroyed by the Hagana in 1948, became an Israeli kibbutz in 1949 and was renamed “Ain Dor” which in Hebrew combines “spring” and “generation”.



An Israeli friend of mine was born in Nahariya north of Acre. He had no idea that the name came from the neighboring Arab village which was depopulated and destroyed in 1948: al-Nahr, a village named after the small river, *nahar* in Arabic, that ran through it.

To understand Israeli erasure strategies you need Arabic and Hebrew. But to understand indigenous Palestinian toponyms you need Arabic and Aramaic, the language of most people in Palestine 2000 years ago. We can find the name “mijdal” (or majdal) in many parts of Palestine. It’s the Aramaic word for a fortress or high place.

The word Magdalene, as in Mary Magdalene, comes from Majdal. My daughter’s name is Maryam (a name mentioned in the Quran) its roots are in Aramaic “Mar Yam”, meaning lady of the sea. Many Aramaic place-names were Arabised but many also survived. Similar changes happened with Palestinian Greek place-names. Neopolis, “new city”, became Nablus.

**You argue that Palestine did not grow from tribal origins but from urbanisation processes deriving from the centrality of its geographical position. Why is this important?**

There’s a whole theory that the Arab state come from tribal origins, that the Arabs are Bedouins and camel herders, and that Arab culture is tribalist. This is complete nonsense, it’s Orientalism, as is the idea that Palestine was “a land without a people”, “a barren land” waiting for European settlers to come and colonise it and make it productive.

**Palestine was a country with famous cities. Cities in Palestine, like cities in the Levant and Iraq, are amongst the oldest in the world.**

This is another racist idea. It wasn’t. Palestine was a country with famous cities. Cities in Palestine, like cities in the Levant and Iraq, are amongst the oldest in the world. Gaza was an urban centre 4000 years ago, Jerusalem the same.

It is in the city that organized religion and power and the early city-states evolved, by that I mean having a central authority which could impose rules and order.

The city is where religion began to develop in Palestine and the Near East, not in the desert, that is a myth. Gaza city had schools, currency, theatres, it was a centre of trade and early capitalist industry more than 2500 years ago. Herodotus writing in 500 BCE writes about thriving Palestinian cities and ports and importantly about the polytheism of Palestine. The Bible being written much later created fictional stories which don’t fit the historical facts or the archaeology of Palestine.

Sitting amidst all the ancient civilisations, Egyptian, Sumerian, Babylonian, Persian and Hellenistic, the idea that Palestine would either be an empty territory or have a tribal pastoral culture is absurd. Ancient and Medieval Palestine was on the main trade routes, trading with China, India, Yemen, Old Cairo and

Damascus and the whole Mediterranean region.

The ancient Philistines were the indigenous people. Because they were also sea-traders, they were described as “Sea People”. They were influenced by the empires around them including the Phoenician, Assyrian and the ancient Greek. But they were not people who originated from the sea. The Philistines are very much indigenous to Palestine.

Archaeology shows they were technologically highly advanced people, they were not pastoralists. Even the Bible story of David fighting the Philistine Goliath shows the ‘Judean David’ as a hill shepherd up against an enemy from Iron Age peoples who were advanced, with iron-based technologies.

**What about the Bible stories of the Kingdoms of David and Solomon?**

The Bible says monotheism developed centuries before Herodotus. But when Herodotus in 500 BCE visits Palestinian cities he describes them as having multiple gods, Palestine had nothing to do with monotheism at the time.

**I am interested in real history not myths. In real history Judaism evolved from polytheism.**

The Bible was written in the post-Babylonian exile period much later than Herodotus. It talks of the Kingdom of David and Solomon, a 1000 BC kingdom and empire, because by the time these exiled Jews were writing, around 200 BCE, they saw kingdoms around them and wanted a monarchical system. The Biblical story is a wish not a historical fact. Israeli archaeologists have found absolutely no sign of it.

**Isn’t there any real Jewish history in Palestine?**

Yes, there is. I am not denying Jewish history. Jews were part of Palestinian history but, for much of the ancient history of Palestine, they had no sovereignty in Palestine.

King Herod the Great, a convert to Judaism, came from Idumea, the area between Gaza and Nabatea. He was a Hellenistic Jew ruling under the Romans. The Hashmonean Jews had a real kingdom/s, but their rule lasted only for 150 years.

I am interested in real history not myths. In real history Judaism evolved from polytheism. Archeological evidence shows Yahweh was one Jewish god amongst others, he had a consort called Ashera. Bible writers designate the deity as Elohim, which is a plural.

**Can you tell us something about how your book was received in Palestine during your recent tour?**

Many Palestinians don’t know their own ancient history. They think there are some Egyptian connections and then they study the Islamic history of Palestine. But they were astonished to hear about the cultural influences of the Greeks and of Byzantines, even though present arguments about Christian

Orthodox Church hierarchies stem from the Byzantine Greek period.

They had no idea that Gaza under the Byzantines had some of the best schools in the Mediterranean region. To understand Greek philosophy and rhetoric you need to study the Greek philosophy of Gaza and Caesarea.

Palestinians don't know that Gaza, centuries before Islam, was one of the wealthiest cities and most developed port city in the Mediterranean region. It was well connected to important international trade routes, it was a mixed city, it had Arab bishops under the Byzantines. Palestinians, of course, were Christians for centuries before Islam.

**You point out that all nations rely on myths for nation-building purposes. Are there myths that are associated with Palestine nationalism?**

Some Palestinian nationalists try to produce a counter-narrative by mirroring the "Zionist biblical" narrative. Some Christian Palestinians, who are familiar with the Old and New Testaments, use the Biblical story about the Israelite/Canaanite conflict by saying "We are the Canaanites". Yet the conflict is a modern one and has nothing to do with "Israelites and Canaanites".

### **We don't need a defensive mythical narrative for the ancient history of the country constructed out of the modern conflict with Zionism.**

There were no ethnic Canaanite or Israelite identities in ancient Palestine. Ethnicity is a modern construct. There was a polytheistic multiculturalism in ancient Palestine and Jews (or Judeans) were among the many groups in the country.

We Palestinians don't need a defensive mythical narrative for the ancient history of the country constructed out of the modern conflict with Zionism.

There was no Jewish-Arab dichotomy in ancient Palestine. Indigenous Jews were "Aramaic Jews" and "Arab Jews". In Arab literature there is no Shylock. "Arab Jews" in Palestine were liked and trusted by other Arab religious groups. When in other cities in Europe Jews were segregated, in Jerusalem everyone mixed. In medieval London Jews often lived outside the city walls, not in Palestine under Islam.

Palestinian Muslims, Jews and Christians had a shared history and identity until the advent of European Zionism. There is a famous Palestinian saying. "Have a meal with a Christian and sleep in the house of the Jew" which shows the relationship was close and harmonious. Another saying goes. "There is no one more faithful than al-Samawal/Samuel"—referring to a famous Arab-Jewish poet. This is completely different to the relationship to European Zionist Jewish settlers.

**Given the Palestinians of today do not have a land they can control as their own, is the book a conscious contribution to present Palestinian nationalism or a Palestinian identity?**



Nur Masalha | Photo: courtesy of the author

You need to fight to replace myth narrative and propaganda with real historical narrative in its full complexity, away from colonial imperial narratives, away from the, "What did the Romans do for us?" type of questions.

I wanted a fact-based history about ordinary people seeking to determine their own history. We don't need myth narratives like that say Jerusalem was the Jewish capital for 3000 years.

### **History in all its complexities can be a liberating project.**

I'd like to take the project further, to encourage others to do similar studies of Ancient History for Palestinian kids. Those in power control many aspects of our lives; they have large armies and police forces; they control the law and the courts and, above all, they control the land, but they cannot control our minds, our thinking.

De-colonising your mind is a way to begin to be free and to take control. Thinking and writing critically are ways to communicate freedom and struggle for justice and to change things. You can teach history to Palestinians in Israeli jails, you can build universities even under occupation. History in all its complexities can be a liberating project.

*Palestine: A Four Thousand Year History*, by Nur Masalha is published by Zed Books.



## YEMEN

## Cement factory workers lead the way

Majed Azan  
and Mirfat  
Sulaiman

While the war on Yemen is covered by the mainstream media, Yemeni workers are having an ongoing war with their bosses. A factory which has over 800 workers, in Abyan not far from Aden, has refused their lawful right to establish a union.

Al-Wahda cement factory bosses have sacked the activists Adil Al-Fadli, Tamir Tauafiq and Majed Kayal, and threatened to discharge others. They have a strong campaign around them and solidarity from other workers and the Dock Workers Union which once led the fight against the British occupation in Aden.

Workers find it laughable that the Imam in the mosque opposite to the factory, which many workers use, gave advice in Friday's prayer that the creation of a union is un-Islamic. This is a clear example of religion being used to oppress workers and become the hand of the ruling class.

South Yemen workers have a proud history of an organised working class going back to the 1950's when Aden and the "protectorate" was a British colony. Ousted (and now dead) Yemen dictator Saleh was unable to reverse that tradition.

The South has been free of war since 2015, but with



Protesters demanded the release of jailed journalist, Sabry Bin Makashin | Photo: Yemeni activists via Facebook



Oil refinery workers walked out in solidarity with arrested colleagues | Photo: Yemeni activists via Facebook

with the Gulf monarchy's latest intervention, the UAE has the upper hand together with corrupt remnants of Saleh's regime.

UAE's domination of the South presents a massive threat to unions and workers who want to progress to democracy. A human rights solicitor said: "we are in a big prison here, and our rights are abused ... I was arrested twice for organising protests."

In other parts of the South in Hadramout, journalist Sabry Bin Makashin remains in prison two months after his arrest by the army intelligence for no crime other than reporting on the corrupt governor in a newspaper article. South Yemen has

laws to protect freedom of press and Bin Makashin was not charged with anything. There has been no court appearance, just indefinite detention.

Over 700 graduates who work as administrative staff for £14 a month on temporary contracts at universities in Aden protested and physically blocked the principal's entry and escorted him off the premises.

Five of them later were sacked. Principal Mr Laakel had been removed for his personal conduct and corruption from three universities previously after campaigns by staff, students and parents.

Trade unionists at Aden oil refinery were stopped at

the gates by security guards, denied entry to work and later arrested. Workers immediately walked out on strike and stopped all operations and a few hours later the six men were released.

Their demand was for a full investigation into the explosion of an oil tank a few weeks before the strike.

There are many ongoing struggles going unnoticed, with small victories here and there that keep us inspired.

First published in Arabic by Workers' Voice, founded by trade union activist Majed Azan, translated and edited by Mirfat Sulaiman



## MOROCCO

## YouTube hit leads to closure order for cultural association

### Sara Amal

In August 2018, the well-known Moroccan cultural association Racines allowed the producers of the satirical talk show, “1 diner, 2 cons” (One dinner party, two idiots) to film in their offices for the second time.

The concept for the show is inspired by the French programme 93, Faubourg Saint Honoré by Thierry Ardisson. In the show, two hosts, Amine Belghazi and Youssef El Moudden, invite artists, intellectuals, activists and journalists to debate politics today in Morocco in an open and critical way.

The episode in question

focused principally on a speech by the King, addressing the issue of the protests in the Rif region and Jerrada, the treatment of religious minorities, the failure of the Moroccan model of development and possible alternatives. The 3 parts of the episode were viewed in total 470,000 times on YouTube.

A few weeks after the programme was broadcast, on 12 December 2018, Racines was ordered to appear in court in Casablanca, following a complaint from the police at the instigation of the Minister of the Interior.

The police demanded the dissolution of the cultural association, on the grounds that it has “organised activities unrelated to the objectives mentioned in its statutes”. On 26 December, after only 2 hearings, the tribunal issued a dissolution order against Racines.

The order attempts to bring to an end nearly a decade of activity by Racines, which was founded in September 2010 in Casablanca.

The association demands the horizontal integration of culture in public development policies. It is an initiative of the “General Assembly of Culture in Morocco”, a biennale event organised since 2014 in order to bring together cultural professionals, artists and civil society organisations.

These gatherings also represent an opportunity for the exchange of ideas and practices, leading to the creation of numerous networks in Africa, Europe and the Arab world.

Racines has thus enabled other civil society organisations to draw inspiration from this approach and to develop similar work around cultural policy in their own countries, including Rwanda, Lebanon, Tunisia, Egypt, Mauritania, South Africa, France, Italy and many others.

By proposing culture as an unavoidable tool of human social and economic development, and raising the slogan “Culture is the Solution”, Racines

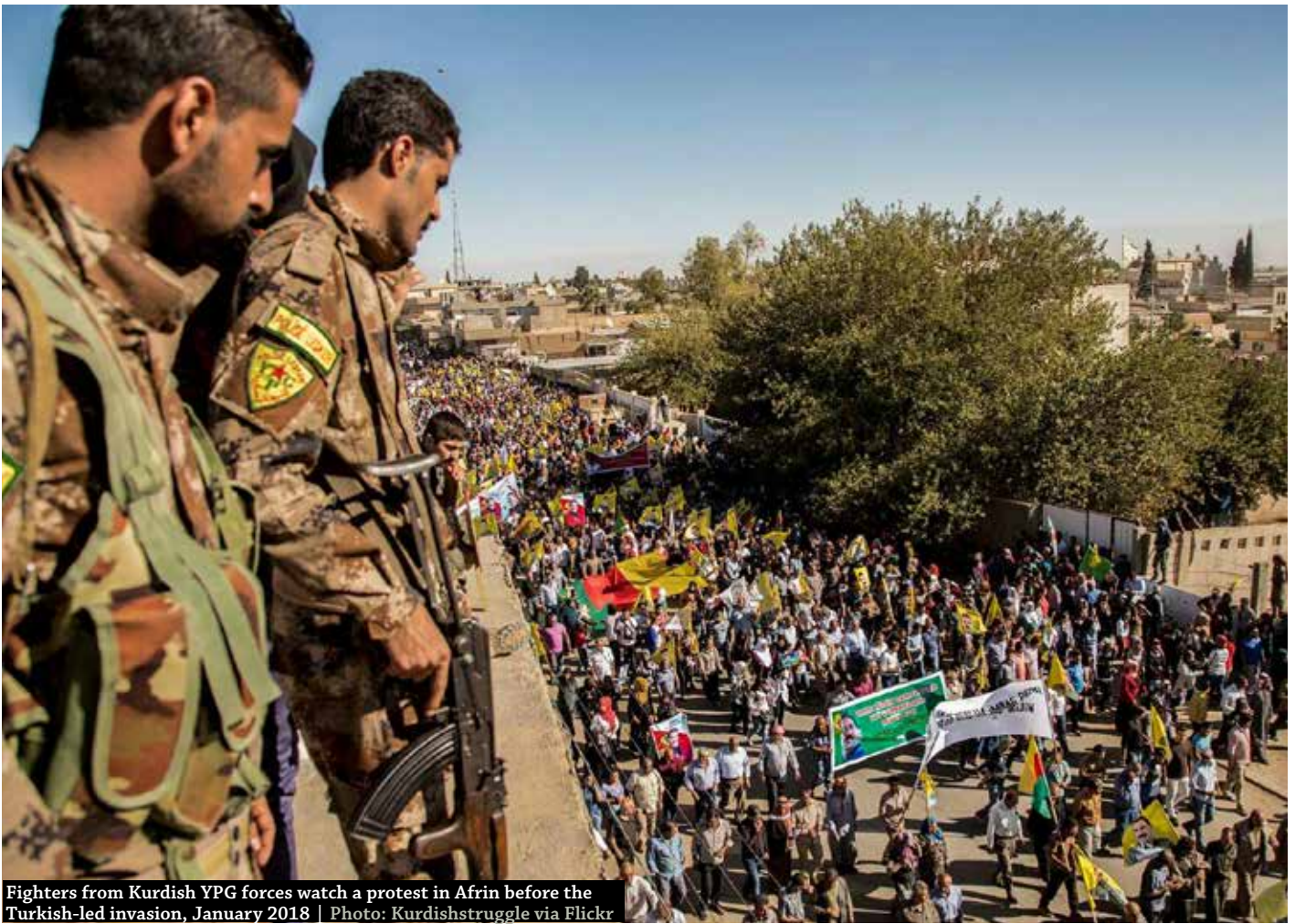
works equally through cultural action and artistic creation, towards citizens’ emancipation, freedom of expression, accountability and solidarity.

It leads numerous activities around issues such as racism, violence against women, access to public space, universal rights and basic freedoms and civic education. The association uses a wide range of formats in its educational work, including films, documentaries, videos and works of theatre.

Racines is appealing the court’s judgement and is continuing its activities while awaiting the next court hearing. A solidarity campaign has been launched by Racines’ partner organisations locally and internationally, including a petition which has gathered support from academics, artists, journalists and activists across the world.

Go to [www.racines.ma](http://www.racines.ma) for more information on the solidarity campaign and updates on the court case





Fighters from Kurdish YPG forces watch a protest in Afrin before the Turkish-led invasion, January 2018 | Photo: Kurdishstruggle via Flickr

# The new battle for Afrin

A year ago, Turkish forces and allied Syrian armed opposition groups marched into Afrin. **Sami Hadaya** analyses how the policies of the new regime are sowing the seeds of future conflict

Turkey and its allies among Syrian armed opposition groups defeated forces affiliated with the Kurdish PYD party and occupied the town of Afrin in northern Syria in March 2018, displacing an estimated 150-250,000 of its original inhabitants. The actions of these armed factions now running Afrin are carrying out policies making it almost impossible for them to return, thus incubating grievances which are likely trigger further episodes of conflict in the future.

Villages such as A'imdar in the district of Rajo, with a previous population of 810 persons, is now reportedly empty of its former residents with explicit and strict prohibitions preventing those displaced from returning. Meanwhile, the original inhabitants in the subdistrict of Mebata are reported to be outnumbered by those "resettled" in the locality with the support of the Turkish government and

its Syrian allies.

In an attempt to change the area's demographics, the Turkish government has been complicit in "resettling" communities in Afrin, including fighters, who were forcibly displaced from Eastern Ghouta, southern Damascus and northern Homs by the Syrian regime. These populations have become a bargaining chip in negotiations between Turkey, Syria and regional states, herded like cattle from one war zone to another.

Inter-communal, and at times familial, relations between some of those forcibly displaced and members of the armed opposition groups have granted them unprecedented privileges under the auspices of the Turkish government. They have gained the authority and legal cover to expropriate the houses, lands, agricultural yields and business profits of Afrin's Kurdish populace.

Turkey's military rule over Afrin, be

it direct or indirect, has given the armed groups unrestrained authority over the district, superseding previously-established democratic local governance structures. These groups are various factions affiliated with the National Army, which has brought together the fragments of the Free Syrian Army under a semi-unified structure. They carry out essential functions such as issuing and verifying the “travel permits” deemed necessary for movement both within Afrin and outside of it. Since under military rule regulations are arbitrary, such procedures disproportionately affect locals and particularly Kurds among them.

Kidnappings, extortions, lootings and summary executions are common and systematic. Maintaining good relations with one military faction or other is for many the only way to survive, as these groups also control access to jobs and housing.

This is beginning to reshape the social and class structure of Afrin along ethno-sectarian lines.

The recent establishment of a Chamber for Industrialists and Merchants in Afrin, for instance, is accelerating the creation of a new elite on an ethnic and political basis since membership requests are verified by the local council, which is now controlled by the armed opposition groups. Local Kurdish business owners who are suspected of having any relationship with the PYD are highly unlikely to be admitted on two counts.

Firstly, members of the chamber will enjoy exclusive access to Turkey and Turkish markets only after vetting by the Turkish authorities. This lucrative opportunity is only likely to benefit the handful of Afrini Kurdish business owners who have declared their political loyalty to new Turkish-backed regime.

Secondly, small and medium-sized workshops and industries are excluded from the Chamber. Most large business owners and industrialists fled Afrin in the early stages of the Turkish offensive.

Those who remain have been unable to build up substantial profits because of extortion by the armed opposition groups and are unlikely to be able to afford the Chamber’s hefty registration fees. This process creates a gap which a new economic elite whose interests are bound up with those of the armed opposition groups and the Turkish state is starting to fill.



Syrian armed groups and Turkish forces celebrate the capture of Afrin | Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Expropriation of Afrin’s olive yields, previously constituting more than 70 percent of the town’s overall revenues, has enabled Turkey to take control of an estimated £62m worth of olive oil, exporting most of it to Spain according to a report in The Telegraph. Part of this revenue will be used to finance Turkey’s allies in Afrin. Resources belonging to the local population of Afrin are thus being used to prop up an abusive and oppressive system

### As Turkish bombs rained down on Afrin, Tillerson met Erdogan to discuss Turkey’s “legitimate concerns” over security on its borders.

The fate of Afrin is bound up with the wider dynamics of the Syrian civil war. As an area under Kurdish control cut off from Rojava, the main autonomous Kurdish region to the East, Afrin was a prime target for Turkish intervention. The military successes of the Syria regime, thanks to Iranian and Russian support, have also pushed armed opposition groups towards the border with Turkey.

The confidence of Turkish president Erdogan that he and his allies could crush part of the Kurdish experiment in self-governance which emerged since Syrian government forces fled the region in the early stages of the 2011 revolution, is fueled by shifts in US policy. As Turkish bombs rained down on Afrin last year, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson met Erdogan to discuss Turkey’s “legitimate concerns” over security on its borders.

Kurdish hopes of continued US protection in recognition of the key part played by Kurdish forces and

their allies in the fight against ISIS, were dealt a much more serious blow in December 2018, when Trump announced the withdrawal of US troops from Syria arguing that their job was done following the “defeat” of ISIS.

A major offensive by the Syrian Democratic Forces allied to the US in late February crushed the last pocket of ISIS-held territory in the village of Baghouz in Deir Ezzor province near the border with Iraq.

UK media coverage of the “last stand” of the ISIS caliphate has focussed on the cases of so-called “jihadi brides”, such as East End teenager Shamima Begum who escaped from Baghouz a few weeks before the offensive by the SDF. Demonised by the right-wing media as a security threat in a racist panic over ISIS supporters returning to the UK, Begum has now been stripped of her UK citizenship, effectively rendering her stateless and raising fears for the fate of her newborn child. Punishing vulnerable civilians associated with ISIS will sow the seeds for new conflicts, particularly while thousands of former ISIS fighters are in the process of surrendering or are on the run.

US willingness to abandon Kurdish forces in Afrin underscores how competition between global and regional powers in the Syrian civil war has deepened the conflict rather than offering any kind of solution. Rather than ending the story of ISIS, the fall of Baghouz is also likely to mark the beginning of another phase in the long-drawn out war for control over northern Syria.

Sami Hadaya is a Syrian activist living in the UK. Additional reporting by Anne Alexander.



# SUDAN RISES



After thirty years of dictatorship and war, people across Sudan are on the streets demanding change. **Irang Bak** analyses the roots of the current uprising.

Hundreds gathered to mourn Ahmed al-Kheir Awad al-Karim, a 36 year-old school teacher whose body was found on 2 February. Sudanese security forces seized Ahmed from his home for participating in protests against the El Bashir regime and tortured him to death.

More than 50 people have been killed and thousands detained so far, but Sudanese people are continuing their series of protests against the El Bashir regime. The authorities are using live ammunition, rubber bullets, and tear gas to stop the protesters taking to the streets.

The protests began as early as 7 December 2018, when primary school students in Sennar state protested

against hunger and high prices after many bakeries were forced to shut down due to the lack of flour. On 13 December, demonstrations followed in Ed Damazin in the Blue Nile state: this time secondary students protested against the government's policies. The following week, protests spread rapidly to other cities such as Qadaref, Dongola, Port Sudan, Nhoud, and the capital Khartoum.

The tripling of bread prices from one Sudanese pound (£0.016) to three Sudanese pounds (£0.048) amidst fuel shortages and an inflation rate of 160 percent was the spark for the uprising.

Teachers, doctors, lawyers, and pharmacists joined the movement, going on strike to demand better

working conditions and the downfall of the regime. The Sudanese Professionals' Association (SPA), an umbrella group of independent trade unions has been the leading body of the current wave of protests.

After demonstrations led by students, the SPA organised a workers' march to the presidential palace in Khartoum on 25 December, demanding El Bashir step down.

Despite the regime's repression during the past 30 years, the people of Sudan haven't remained silent. A popular uprising took place in 2013

over fuel and gas price rises and the government's austerity measures. Then the security forces killed 200 protesters in less than two weeks.

The scale of the current movement is much wider and the crisis faced by the regime more intense, yet there remain many obstacles to overcome.

The Sudanese armed forces have declared that they will not allow the state to fall or to slide into the unknown. As the military, the backbone of El Bashir's power, and his allies remain committed in continuing the repression, achieving the demands of

the people will not be an easy task.

Yet protesters are determined to build a powerful movement which can shake the regime.

As 23-year old activist Fatima Joda puts it "It's not easy to throw a dictatorship out that has been in power for 30 years. It will take months and maybe years till we get our freedom. The only thing I am sure about now is that we are not going to be silent anymore."

[Read more of Fatima's story on page 11](#)

## Who's backing El Bashir?

In a response to more than two months of mass protests and popular uprising, El Bashir declared a year-long state of emergency on 22 February. Any gathering or protest without authorisation will be outlawed and all unauthorised trade unions and strikes will also be banned. The security forces are granted powers to monitor, search and arrest people and confiscate properties. This is an desperate attempt by the regime to suppress the movement from below.

Yet although Western governments accuse El Bashir's regime of violating human rights and carrying out genocide in Darfur, the EU's repressive border policies are channelling funding to Sudan.

Since 2014, the EU has been involved in attempts to stem the flow of refugees from East Africa by paying regimes in the region to step up their border security. The plan, known as the Khartoum Process, makes available huge amounts of cash, security expertise and policing technology to governments in the region, including Sudan. The EU has established a Regional Operational Centre, or ROCK, which has the role of coordinating the activities of East Africa security forces, including those of the Sudanese regime, with European migration agencies.

Run by British, French and Italian security personnel, the Centre is designed to support different national security forces in the region, including Sudan's Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a militia refashioned from the notorious Janjaweed. This militia presided over a reign in terror in Darfur but in a new guise as the RSF it is tasked with

policing Sudan's border with Libya and rounding up refugees from Eritrea and Ethiopia.

The Khartoum Process, also known as the Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative, involves parcelling out funding to the security forces and border agencies in the region, with Sudan receiving some €215m in 2017 alone. This money finds itself in the hands of the very security services used

by the El Bashir regime to suppress domestic dissent.

El Bashir's backers are not only to be found in Europe. As protests against his 30 years of dictatorship escalated, El Bashir was on board a flight to Qatar and Egypt to seek support. He has also maintained good relations with Qatar's local rival Saudi Arabia, which has provided loans of 8bn Saudi riyals (£207m) to Sudan over the last four years.

El Bashir's regime has participated actively in the war against Yemen by a Saudi-led military coalition. Up to 14,000 Sudanese fighters have reportedly been sent to fight in Yemen. Most of them are from the most impoverished region of the country, Darfur, and according to a recent investigation by the New York Times many of them are children.

The conflict in Darfur started in 2003 and left an estimated 300,000 people dead and 3.2m displaced. This was a result of genocide directed at non-arab population, leading to an endless circle of terrorisation and retaliation between the regime forces and rebel groups.

Competition over the region's oil resources has been a major factor driving these conflicts. The USA supported the separation of oil-rich South Sudan from Sudan after a referendum on independence in 2011, partly in order to restrain Chinese influence over Sudan's oil industry.

South Kordofan is another oil-rich region in the south of Sudan. Although the local population desires to be a part of newly independent South Sudan, the El Bashir regime is using violence in a bid to keep control of the territory.



Omar El Bashir | Photo: Wikimedia Commons

- **Brought to power by a military coup in 1989**
- **Implemented neoliberal reforms under the guise of "shari'a law"**
- **Laid off 100,000 public sector workers by 1992**
- **Banned independent trade unions and imprisoned, killed and tortured their leaders**



# 'WE ARE NO LONGER SCARED OF DEATH'



Photo: SPA via Facebook

Fatima Joda

On 17 January I was in the crowd, out on the streets of Burri, one of the most politically active neighborhoods of Khartoum. As we were moving peacefully along, women and children from the area joined the protest and started chanting with us.

Security Forces started breaking up the crowd by throwing teargas at us. Everyone began running and hiding inside the houses, which the neighborhood families opened up in order to hide the protesters. After a couple of minutes we began to gather again as security forces and police drove to a near street to separate other protesters.

The crowd was bigger the second time, but this time the force used was more brutal. The security forces used live bullets, and detained everyone they captured. They were terrible, beating, torturing and mocking those who got caught. One of the boys who got captured was getting beaten by five men and we started to see blood

coming out his body.

One of the girls couldn't handle seeing that, and she went out screaming and tried to stop them, but she ended up getting beaten and detained with him. While this was happening, another protester was trying to escape, but they shot him with a live bullet and in seconds the guy was down. Until now, we don't know who he was or where they took him.

The teargas they use makes your body and eyes burn, your vision becomes blurred and sometimes you completely lose your sight for minutes. You have a hard time breathing; I have witnessed many people fainting and having a complete blackout during other protests.

Many protesters have lost parts of their bodies, like Samih and Amani who completely lost one of their eyes. The security forces are attacking injured people inside hospitals, breaking into activists' houses and detaining them, threatening journalists with execution, banning newspapers, detaining and torturing kids who are less than 15 years old.

A teacher who was arrested from his home was tortured to death

inside the detention cell. Mahgoub Al-Taj Mahjoub, a second year medical student from Al Razi College was beaten to death in front of his university for defending his female colleagues from police men.

Despite the repression, we feel the revolution is different this time. Unlike previous movements like the one in 2013 where many protesters were also killed, more people are involved. We are fed up. People are starving, they are being oppressed in every aspect of their lives. They know how corrupt the government is and the extent of human rights violations since Omar El Bashir's regime came to power in 1989.

We are no longer scared of death, and you can tell this from the increasing numbers of people joining the protests every day. Everyone is out on the streets now.

It's not easy to overthrow a dictatorship that has been in power for 30 years. It will take months and maybe years till we get our freedom. The only thing I am sure about now is that we are not going to be silent anymore.

Fatima Joda is an activist in Sudan

# 'PRICES ROSE EVERY DAY'

Amira

Prices started rising every day. Not every month, but every single day. Bread started running out, and petrol and the money from the cash machines.

People would queue all day and all night in order to get a loaf

of bread. Most people in Sudan don't earn enough to make ends meet, particularly if they have a family and kids at school. In every neighbourhood, young people were coming out to protest.

Everyone was saying that in the New Year prices would go up even further. When the New Year came around, people had been standing in the queues for months.

There was a strike by school teachers, my niece was off school for more than a month.

For weeks children have been stuck at home, without anything to do, hearing the sound of the bullets and smelling tear gas from the streets.

Amira was visiting family in Khartoum when the protests started

# ‘We want to see an African Spring’

Dr Sara Abdelgalil

Since 1989 there have been several uprisings in the Sudan, but none managed to achieve change because of the government's violence and its arrests of leaders in the communities. One of the worst examples was in 2013 when 200 people were killed. Arrests continued for months and people were held without any investigation taking place.

The trigger for the current uprising was the release of the budget in January 2018. People called it the “Hunger Budget”. At the time there were protests in the streets, and some of the leaders were arrested. The government made promises to improve, but nothing changed, in fact things got worse.

By the end of last year people could not get any currency, they were not getting paid their salaries. If you wanted money from the cash machine you had to queue for hours from 5am. Then the price of bread started rising. There were no medicines, and no fuel.

This is not just protests over bread and fuel, it is a revolution. There is unity between all different sectors of society. Women and girls are at on the frontline. Young and old people are involved alongside the political leaders. The Sudan Professionals Association is a new addition. It was announced in 2018. However, the work to build it up has been ongoing for a few years.

The SPA organises journalists, lawyers, doctors and teachers. People are organising themselves and applying to join. There have been other groups who are part of the SPA but also working independently.

The University of Khartoum lecturers had a press conference providing a detailed plan for the transition period. As lecturers and academics they have pledged to help with the rebuilding of services. There are 530 lecturers and professors who have signed up to the pledge. They had



Photo: SPA via Facebook

a protest inside the University's library on 30 January. This lifted people's spirits and it shows there is true commitment to rebuilding.

The demonstrations and protests are part of our peaceful resistance. They have given people hope and confidence, so that they feel we are not weak. Then there came the Declaration of Freedom and Change, announced on 1 January 2019, Sudanese Independence Day.

The Declaration has three objectives. It is the pathway between the peaceful stepping down of the current regime, towards a four year transition period, rebuilding the country and democratic elections. The major forces in Sudan, including more than 20 political

parties and youth groups have signed.

The only part missing is the army and the police. Middle and junior ranks are getting fed up, they are suffering financially too. But senior levels are loyal to the regime. We have the army, the police, national intelligence and security and the government militia.

We are trying to send messages to the army and police calling on them to protect the people and not al-Bashir. We see little signs of hope, such as soldiers coming down from their trucks to take food from the women who bring provisions to the protests and thanking them.

For me as a Sudanese woman, it is interesting to see how wide the support for this movement goes among Sudanese women. We have seen Facebook groups which were previously just for discussions about beauty and cooking showing their support for the protests. They have even been using the Facebook groups to identify police officers involved in beating protesters and warning people to stay away from them. Young women from these groups put out a statement on 31 January.

At the sit-ins people have been playing music and reading poems. *silmiyya* (peaceful) is a slogan of the protests. We are proud that we are using peaceful tools and trying to maintain a peaceful movement, even though 50 people have been killed. One of our colleagues, Dr Babiker Abdel Hameed was shot by the police: he was targeted because he was a healthworker.

We want to see an African Spring. We want to keep the revolution independent. Sudan has a history of being able to achieve democracy. It was the Islamists who assassinated our democracy. People are aware this time that it can't be a one-party revolution, it is everybody's revolution.

Dr Sara Abdelgalil is president of the Sudan Doctors' Union, UK branch





Egyptian activists protest against al-Sisi in Berlin | Photo: Hossam el-Hamalawy

# ‘This regime has a phobia of revolution’

Egyptian activist **Taher Mokhtar** analyses the dilemmas facing the military regime, and puts the case for building a stronger solidarity movement

**E**ight years ago, revolution in Egypt raised great hopes for change. However, in the summer of 2013, there was a military coup. Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the leader of the coup, officially became president in 2014. Since then, things have been very dark. All political spaces have been shut down.

We’ve seen the complete repression of the young people who took part in the revolution. It is as if the lesson which the regime learnt from the

revolution was that the political spaces which were open during the Mubarak era would have to be closed. So today there is no space to breathe, politically speaking.

The regime is terrified of the revolution because the genuine threat that it represented to the military dictatorship. In Egypt we have experienced a long history of armed struggle by Islamist groups, who were opposed to the regime from the 1970s onwards, into the 1980s and 1990s.

These acts of violence didn’t threaten the regime at all, in fact the opposite was true. The regime benefitted from them in order to maintain its security clampdown. By contrast, the revolution which erupted in January 2011 raised hope for the first time that power could lie with the people, with ordinary citizens, and with young people, rather than at the top of society.

So now the regime is wreaking systematic revenge on everyone who

took part in the revolution. It remains in such a state of terror about the revolution that every year on the anniversary it randomly arrests young activists, even if there are no events to commemorate the revolution.

Houses in the centre of Cairo, for example, are searched during January, and any young activist, known to security as having previously being politically active, risks being arrested without any reason. I think that what happened to Italian PhD student Giulio Regeni, who disappeared on 25 January, is linked to that state of terror and fear in the regime. It has a phobia of revolution.

The situation in Egypt for human rights is very bad. Hundreds of people undergo enforced disappearance every year, torture is widespread and practised openly. I have a personal experience from when I was in prison which illustrates just how common torture is. I was held in a cell with 30 people, 28 of whom had experienced

systematic torture, such as being suspended and electrocuted. Torture is used to extract false “confessions” from activists which are used as “evidence” in court, leading to long jail sentences or even to executions.

There are more than 30 cases of death sentences imposed after military trials between December 2017 and March 2018, for example. After that there was some international pressure on Egypt so that the sentences were delayed.

We have a parliament which is full of candidates put in place by the security services with the aim of supporting the dictatorship. In the presidential elections which took place in the spring last year, al-Sisi was the only candidate.

All the opposition candidates had withdrawn, such as Khaled Ali, and Nasserist opposition leader Hamdeen Sabahi had announced he would not stand in the current circumstances. Other candidates who attempted to stand were jailed, such as General Sami Anan, who was a leading figure in the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces which ruled Egypt after the fall of Mubarak in 2011, and Ahmad Konsowa, a junior officer.

Ahmad Shafiq, another politician associated with the Mubarak regime, was put under pressure not to announce his candidacy. The regime is even changing the constitution to allow al-Sisi to continue in power, after reaching the legal limit of this term in office.

Support from outside is crucial to the regime. Without European and international support, it would not have been able to carry out the massacres that it did after the coup, such as the massacres at Raba'a and at the Republican Guards' HQ.

At a regional level, the regime is backed primarily by two main powers: Saudi Arabia and UAE. The UAE in particular gave vast amounts of money to the regime in order for it to carry out the military coup, as well as providing security assistance and diplomatic support. There are extremely close relations between Saudi Arabia, UAE and Egypt, on the one hand and they are also supported closely by Israel.

Within Egypt, however, at the moment the regime can only count on the support of the institutions of the state. But we cannot consider the regime enjoys the political backing of everyone who works in the judiciary, or in the police or in the army.

These are not political sectors

although they are obliged to support the regime through the exercise of their professions. Even among businessmen, we don't find the same levels of support for the regime as in the past, largely because of the role played by military institutions in the economy.

The army in Egypt has a very large role in the economy. There are no clear figures, but it is estimated that around 30-40 percent of the Egyptian economy is managed by the military.

When the army enters competition for markets in Egypt, it will obviously win. For example, it can mobilise conscripts for work, it has access to resources, it has land it can use for free for industrial development and so on. These factors give military industries an inbuilt advantage over their civilian competitors as they can lower the costs of production.

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### **We are not just talking about the direct takeover by the military of large parts of media and industry.**

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The army has also control over a large part of the media through control of a number of media channels. There are channels which are directly managed by the security services, and in some cases owned by the security services, producing soap operas, films and music. We are not just talking about political interference, therefore, but the direct takeover by the military of large parts of media and industry.

Nevertheless, the regime has made a number of huge mistakes in economic policy. When al-Sisi came into power, he wanted to make a success of projects such as the “New Suez Canal” project.

These projects ate up a lot of Egypt's hard currency reserves, but they haven't brought the benefits they were supposed to for the economy. Egypt's revenue hasn't increased as a result of building the “New Canal”, and of course the whole project was very costly as it was completed in a single year.

After the crisis which happened with the New Suez Canal, the regime took out a loan from the IMF. In order to meet the conditions for the loan, the regime imposed a number of austerity policies, which forced ordinary people to bear its costs.

The subsidy on petrol was reduced, the price of medicines rose, the cost

cooking gas increased and the all the prices of goods in the shops went up. Every six months or so, the same thing has happened again.

In October 2016, the price of a Metro (underground) ticket was 1 Egyptian pound, now it is between 3-7 pounds depending on the number of stations travelled. So for some people the cost of travel has gone up seven-fold in just two years.

The rise in prices affects every area of life. This is putting ordinary Egyptians under incredible stress. Every week or so there is a video of one or two people who have killed themselves by jumping in front of a Metro train, because of the scale of the economic crisis. Now the Metro are putting out notices telling people to please go and kill themselves somewhere else.

The imposition of these austerity policies took place after the regime clamped down on political protest completely. The last wave of big protests was over the transfer of the Tiran and Sanafir Islands to Saudi Arabia, and that triggered a massive wave of repression, with hundreds of activists jailed.

The austerity measures came in immediately afterwards. The sale of Tiran and Sanafir was also a major issue, because from the beginning, the regime posed as being patriotic. Yet it was prepared to sell the Tiran and Sanafir Islands to Saudi Arabia.

The regime has been able to exercise a degree of hegemony through breaking protests by force. Despite this, when the price of Metro tickets went up, last April, there were spontaneous protests inside Metro stations, with people shouting that they wouldn't pay, that they would go in without paying and so on.

The regime arrested a lot of people collectively, including political activists who the regime expected might have been protesting. This is what happened to Haitham Mohamadein, for example, who is a labour activist and a well-known labour lawyer.

In my view, the regime has two main points of weakness. Firstly, it lacks a political base. Its rule is based on force and support from abroad, such as the backing of Saudi Arabia and UAE (these countries are also terrified of the prospect of popular uprisings at home).

The second point of weakness is that the Egyptian regime has only been able to make temporary alliances with European powers, and those links have depended on Egypt spending





A giant balloon of al-Sisi as Mickey Mouse overshadows images of political prisoners | Photo: Hossam el-Hamalawy

vast sums of money to build up these partnerships.

So for example, the regime did a deal with the German firm Siemens, and spent billions of pounds to try and win economic support from Germany. It paid billions for Rafale fighter jets from France that no-one else would buy, and is doing the same thing with the UK, the US and so on.

However, these alliances are only short-term and the regime can't count on Western support for the long term, particularly when there are campaigns within those countries opposing it. For example, during a press conference which took place during al-Sisi's visit to Paris in October 2017, French President Emmanuel Macron said that he couldn't give Sisi lessons in human rights.

During a visit to Egypt in January, Macron, speaking at an official function, said the human rights situation in the country under al-Sisi was worse than under Mubarak, and that there was a lack of stability.

This is a sign that al-Sisi's external allies, which are extremely important to him in the absence of real support internally, can turn on him at any moment.

The regime also has no solution to

the economic crises. It is spending vast amounts of money on creating a new administrative capital, which has no important economic role. It serves a political purpose, because the regime is terrified of another revolution taking place in Cairo. It wants to make sure that the institutions of the state are in another place, and it is spending billions to achieve this.

These vast sums are not being used to deal with the economic crisis, because the regime's only solutions are security solutions, such as moving the location of government ministries, or increasing repression.

### Why are our governments supporting a dictator who is no less brutal than Pinochet in Chile?

The Egyptian regime relies on the support of European governments, who in turn are benefiting from the regime's spending on arms for example. What is needed is that people in Europe who can stand up and oppose the partnership between their own governments and this criminal regime get organised to demand change.

The first issue to take up would be arms sales, or equipment that can be used in repression. This must be a target for opposition. We need to pile on the pressure through petitions, demonstrations and parliamentary questions. Asking "why are our governments supporting a dictator who is no less brutal than Pinochet in Chile?"

The second focus for activists outside Egypt must be to mobilise solidarity for activists and trade unionists in the country. For example, by raising the case of trade unionists, political activists and human rights activists who are facing persecution, whether they are in jail or they are prevented from travelling or sacked from their jobs. The regime plays on isolation and this solidarity is very important.

Finally, it is crucial to be in contact with Egyptian activists in Europe, and to coordinate with them on campaigns against repression in Egypt. These are the most important things that we can do right now.

Taher Mokhtar is a doctor and human rights activist, now living in France. Go to page 26 to find out more about campaigns for Egyptian detainees.

# UKHE Plc. How British universities are lining the pockets of Middle Eastern autocrats



In this special report, we investigate a new round of investment in branch campuses in the UAE and Egypt. **Anne Alexander** and **Alice Finden** explore how repressive regimes in the UAE and Egypt are set to benefit, while **Ioana Cerasella Chis** reports on how trade unions are challenging college managers' drive to put profit before people.

**T**he case of Durham PhD student Matthew Hedges, who was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of spying in UAE in November 2018, has thrown a spotlight on UK universities' links with the repressive Gulf monarchy.

Although Hedges was later pardoned, his story has helped to bring to light systematic human rights abuses whitewashed by UK universities in their rush to tap into lucrative overseas student markets.

Higher education managers seem happy to turn a blind eye to the systematic abuse of the construction and service workers who create the gleaming, hi-tech learning environments promised to prospective

students, and to ignore evidence of the UAE's rulers' repression of critical voices and their criminalisation of diversity in sexuality and gender expression.

University of Birmingham has recently announced the opening of a satellite campus in Dubai International Academic City (DIAC) where recruitment is underway for the first intake of students in September 2019.

UoB Dubai is joining a list of other UK universities hosted by DIAC, including Heriot Watt University, Middlesex University, Manchester Business School, University of Bradford, University of Exeter and the British University in Dubai which

Dubai's towering skyline hides ruthless exploitation and repression of the workers who built it | Photo: Challiyan via Wikimedia



offers degrees in partnership with the Universities of Cardiff, Manchester, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

However, UoB's drive to cash in on the incentives offered by UAE's repressive rulers in order to entice international universities to invest has met with organised resistance back home in the UK. UCU and Unison branches at UoB are leading a determined campaign to expose the abuses of workers' and LGBT+ rights and attacks on freedom of expression in UAE.

As Unison chair Ioana Cerasella Chis explains below, this is not just question of a taking a principled position in solidarity with UAE citizens and residents who may find themselves on the wrong side of the law, but a direct challenge to senior managers who are prepared to put their own staff at risk in the pursuit of profit.

## The business of higher education

Construction of Phase 1 of the Dubai campus of the University of Birmingham was completed in 2018, with the first intake of students beginning courses in September 2018. The campus is located in Dubai International Academic City, which is owned by TECOM Group, part of Dubai Holding. DIAC claims to be "The world's largest free zone dedicated to higher education and the pursuit of intellectual growth" with a student population of 27,000.

This is higher education packaged as yet another "business community." Tecom's website boasts a large portfolio of business park "cities" serving the media, outsourcing, manufacturing, energy and technology industries.

The company is owned by Dubai Holding, a vast investment conglomerate with assets worth £27bn, and the personal investment vehicle of the emirate's ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, who is also the current prime minister of UAE.

The first phase of the UoB Dubai campus accommodates 300 students, but by 2021 the university plans to take up a 50,000 sq m plot with a projected student population of 2900. An agreement launching phase 2 of the campus construction project was signed on 14 February by UoB Vice Chancellor David Eastwood and the Tecom CEO Malek Al Malek.

While UoB managers look to the new campus to help deliver "ongoing income and growth diversification" in the midst of "domestic uncertainties", the construction workers engaged on the project will face the same appalling conditions experienced across the sector in the UAE.

## Abuse built into the system

The UAE is one of a number of states in the region which uses the "Kafala system", an employment framework that requires migrant workers to have a sponsor residing as a national of the country. Without their employer's permission, a worker cannot leave the job, change jobs, or exit the country.



**Migrant construction workers face poor conditions across the Gulf** | Photo: Amnesty

These problems are compounded by the role played by recruitment agencies, which often charge extortionate fees to match workers with prospective employers, saddling them with huge debts.

On arrival many workers face late payment or non-payment of wages by their UAE employers. Even if workers do obtain employers' permission to leave the country, they still have to pay for an exit permit, and overstayers are charged a daily fine of up to 100 dirhams (around £20).

Workers cannot effectively challenge abusive employers or use collective action to improve pay and working conditions legally. They have no right to form trade unions and strikes are a criminal offence.

Living conditions for construction workers are often also appalling, according to international trade unions. General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) Sharan Burrow says: "people are treated like battery hens. They're locked in. There are guards. They leave at 5.30-6am, they go home at 6-7pm in the evening, or later if they are forced to work overtime, often unpaid."

## Ten years in jail for a tweet

"At the University of Birmingham Dubai, we encourage bold, independent thinking," gushes the online publicity for the new campus. What prospective students aren't told, of course, is that students or staff who express views considered critical of the UAE's rulers run the risk of secret detention and long jail sentences.

Amnesty International highlights the stories of five prisoners of conscience currently detained by UAE on its website. They include human rights advocate Ahmed Mansoor who was forcibly disappeared by the authorities and held in secret for more than a year before being sentenced to ten years imprisonment for a tweet "insulting the status and prestige of the UAE and its symbols". Mansoor's "crime" was to speak out on social media over the UAE's leading role in the war and famine devastating Yemen.

## LGBT+ rights under threat

In Dubai, being gay or transgender risks imprisonment, flogging and execution, yet UoB has left staff and students without adequate guidance on what it will do to protect their rights when working or studying in Dubai, union leaders say. UCU and Unison have urgently called on the university to develop an explicit safeguarding policy for LGBT+ staff and students at the Dubai campus. James Brackley of Birmingham UCU points out that the Dubai handbook for staff actually removes some references to gender and sexuality equality, suggesting "a watering down of LGBT+ rights."

[Read more on the repression of human rights activists in UAE on the Amnesty International website.](#)

# 'Managers are putting profit before people'

Ioana Cerasella Chis

The University of Birmingham management have put profit before people, and decided to open a campus in a place that is well known for its human rights violations.

They made the decision to open the campus in Dubai behind closed doors, and unions have not been consulted on any aspects of the working conditions of those who will be working on the campus or remotely.

While management believe that they can afford to invest millions in this campus, in Birmingham we are told that the University cannot seek Living Wage Accreditation because of the 'financial risks' involved - i.e. they do not want to 'depend' on an external organisation setting the wages for the University.

This is just one example that illustrates their double-standards, and where their priorities are. As a branch, Unison passed two motions on the Dubai campus in 2018.

The main elements of the early 2018 motion were included in a letter sent to management and a joint unions report, asking them to negotiate with us and to address a series of concerns.

We have also included the demands regarding the Dubai project in an indicative ballot which passed in late 2018 (we are now working on conducting a formal strike ballot).

We are appalled that the University will benefit from using the work done by migrant workers who, in the UAE, have no right to be part of trade unions (it is a criminal offence to join one), whose working conditions are extremely precarious, and whose rights as workers are not recognised. We have raised concerns regarding (but not limited) to the appalling working conditions and exploitation of migrant workers in the UAE and the risks to LGBT+ students and staff.

We asked how the university will be able to support and protect them. The fact that trade unions are illegal in the



## UCU calls on staff to refuse 'voluntary' work at UoB Dubai

A vote by UCU members at the University of Birmingham urges staff to boycott the new campus, unless work for UoB Dubai is specifically mentioned in their contract. Their refusal to work in conditions where human rights and academic freedoms are under constant threat has struck a chord more widely, with one hundred academics pledging to support the UoB Dubai boycott by refusing roles such as external examiners and visiting lecturers.

UAE leads to a breach of our procedural agreement with the University. We want to know how we can support members who are based there.

There is also the very real possibility that the curriculum on the Dubai campus will not mirror the one in Birmingham. The University's response has been evasive and we received no concrete reassurances to any of our queries. At a joint meeting with unions on 6 November management refused to discuss the Dubai campus at all.

Furthermore, their refusal to lobby the UAE for Matthew Hedges' release is deeply worrying, as it reflects their lack of commitment to human rights, and lack understanding of the ethical implications of 'doing business' with a state that is involved in Yemen's war and famine.

We have also recently passed a motion where we called on the University to suspend plans for expanding the campus and recruiting thousands of students until they can guarantee full rights for every migrant worker contracted to work on the Dubai campus, students and members of staff.

We also demanded that staff who have been working on the University of Birmingham's Dubai campus remotely should be allowed to withdraw their participation with the Dubai project at any time, if a case such as the jailing of Matthew Hedges has caused them to reconsider their role.

Some of our members' work is directly benefiting the development

of the (academic, support and virtual/technical) infrastructure of the Dubai project.

Therefore, Birmingham-based staff find it difficult to refuse to have their work used for the Dubai project, especially when it is automatically embedded in it via the virtual infrastructure. The university said that no staff will be put under pressure to work there, but we know that "soft power" is being used to nudge staff (directly or indirectly) to use their time, knowledge and resources for the benefit of the Dubai campus.

When we surveyed members about the new campus and asked them "would you feel safe if you were asked to go to work in Dubai?" all members who emailed us responded with "no".

We are determined to continue with our campaign, and concerns over the Dubai campus have been part of Unison's successful indicative ballot on pay and working conditions. We are now following the procedures needed to organise a formal strike ballot in 2019.

We would like to send a message of solidarity to all LGBT+ people and activists in the UAE, and to those who work there under appalling conditions.

Ioana Cerasella Chis is chair of Unison at the University of Birmingham. Go to [www.uobunison.org.uk](http://www.uobunison.org.uk) for more information on their campaign





Promotional videos show gleaming new research facilities in the New Administrative Capital | Photo: Screenshot via Vimeo

## Education firm set up by cable manufacturer to run Coventry University in Egypt

Anne Alexander

**E**gypt's military regime is counting on enticing universities to establish international branch campuses in the New Administrative Capital, which is taking shape in the desert around 40km from Cairo.

The construction of this huge new development, designed to replace the thousand-year old current capital, was meant to attract foreign investment, although the project is actually being overseen by a company which is split 51-49 percent between the Egyptian Armed Forces and the New Urban Communities Authority, another Egyptian government agency.

**Liverpool's Egypt expansion plans remain on ice, but Coventry University is pushing ahead with a new campus**

As we reported in our last issue, UK universities have been the targets of an extensive charm offensive by the regime, with the full support of the British government. However, a campaign by UCU members at the

University of Liverpool and University of Cambridge, which was backed by hundreds of academics from across the UK, won a significant victory.

According to a leaked document published on the Academic Freedom Watch website, the University of Liverpool was worried about the potential for "reputational damage" if it pressed ahead with plans to build a new branch campus in Egypt.

Although no official announcement has been made, activists in Liverpool say that the drive for a new campus has stalled under the pressure of the campaign.

The Liverpool document reveals just how deeply investing universities would be indebted to the al-Sisi regime, as officials had apparently "indicated willingness to meet initial investment costs" to University of Liverpool managers.

Meanwhile, fee income would have been set at a level very few Egyptians could afford; £8,000 per year in a country where the annual salary for workers on the minimum wage is around £600.

While Liverpool's Egypt expansion plans remain on ice, Coventry University is pushing ahead with a partnership to open a campus in the New Administrative Capital. In December 2018, the university announced a partnership with El Sewedy Education, an Egyptian "education investment and management company", to open a branch in "The Knowledge Hub", "a world-class multidisciplinary higher education campus."

The company is headed by Ahmed El Sewedy, CEO of El Sewedy Electric, an Egyptian cables and electrical

components manufacturer. The parent company has done well in recent years, and now boasts 30 production facilities in 14 countries.

Like the bulk of the business elite in Egypt, the El Sewedys have long been well embedded in the structures of the regime. Under Mubarak the family was represented on the business secretariat of the ruling National Democratic Party, while under Sisi two members head up the powerful industrial and energy and environment committees in parliament.

The company's track record in providing education at any level is somewhat thin, consisting of a technical secondary school in 10th Ramadan City providing places for around 500 students, and a primary school. The company's website also highlights donations of equipment and the renovation of classrooms and toilets at a handful of other primary and early years schools.

**Recruitment is underway for Heads of School who are "looking for their next global adventure"**

Despite this, El Sewedy Education has ambitious plans. The Knowledge Hub campus alone will cost around \$400m. The first students are expected to arrive in September 2019, to study for degrees in Engineering, Computing and Digital Media, and by 2028 the campus will accommodate around 1,500 - 2000 in total.

Recruitment is underway for Heads of School who are "looking for their next global adventure", according to the Coventry University website. At the time of writing, clicking on the links to

job descriptions produced a series of “page not found” error messages.

Despite the attractiveness of the shiny new buildings pictured on the Knowledge Hub’s website, anyone applying for these roles would be advised to ask some detailed questions about the conditions of employment.

According to Coventry University’s website, staff recruited will be “employed by the Knowledge Hub and not by Coventry University”.

Yet the picture painted by Ihab Salama, CEO of El Sewedy Education, in an interview with Daily News Egypt is somewhat different. “All the heads of the departments will come from the mother branch and will be supported by professors from the same university as well” he declared.

The overall legal framework for the IBC itself, as laid out in the law which came into force in August 2018, also raises troubling questions as to whether the “free exchange of ideas” promised in El Sewedy Education’s promotional materials about the Knowledge Hub, is just a mirage.

The president of the IBC’s appointment is subject to approval by the Egyptian Minister of Higher

Education, and two representatives of the Ministry will sit on the Board of Trustees.

In addition the Ministry will appoint an “advisor” to the IBC. Even Universities UK notes that “such a degree of oversight is likely to be unappealing to universities.”

There is no explicit commitment that IBCs will be able to operate according to the requirements of UK law, for example in relation to equalities legislation, just a vaguely-worded statement that the IBC will operate within a “framework of academic and institutional autonomy and freedom”.

### **The new law demands that IBCs provide the authorities with the facilities to enable them to verify the observance of “security and public order”**

It is hard to see how much “institutional autonomy” would be enjoyed even by senior management in the IBC, as according to the law, Ministerial approval is required for

all academic and senior management positions.

The new law also states that IBCs must “provide the concerned authorities with the facilities to enable them to verify the IBC observance of the requirements of security and public order”.

Students and academics expressing dissenting views about the current regime, trade unionists calling for safer working conditions, and LGBT+ Egyptians have all been targeted under “public order” legislation in Egypt, including highly repressive “anti-terror” laws.

What would the penalties be for failing to provide security forces offices on campus, or refusing to share data about student activism or failing to report on the content of teaching which might put “security” at risk?

Read more on the lack of academic freedom in Egypt and download campaign materials on the Egypt Solidarity Initiative website. Go to [www.egyptsolidarityinitiative.org](http://www.egyptsolidarityinitiative.org)

## **New report highlights role of military in repression of workers**

### **Egypt Solidarity**

As in UAE, workers involved in building new campuses in Egypt, or providing services and teaching once they are completed, risk jail and worse if they stand up for their rights.

A new report by human rights organisation Frontline Defenders has found. Egyptian labour activists face the worst levels of repression in decades, as the military expands its role in the economy and society.

Recent legislation attacking workers’ rights includes a 2017 law which criminalises strikes in “strategic sectors” and makes the establishment of so-called “political” trade unions, such as those outside the state-controlled union federation, punishable



Striking workers from El Sewedy Cables protest in 2013 | Photo: YouTube

by up to 15 years in prison. At least 14 companies have engaged in mass firings since 2016 in retaliation for peaceful forms of worker activism such as sit-ins and strikes.

Civilian workers and labour organisers have found themselves hauled in front of military tribunals for demanding better working conditions, as the case of 26 workers at the Alexandria Shipyard in 2016 illustrates.

“As the military acquires more

and more factories, farms, hospitals, and service sector business staffed by civilians, the threat of military prosecution to labour rights defenders will continue to rise,” notes the Frontline Defenders report.

Read the full report online at [www.frontlinedefenders.org](http://www.frontlinedefenders.org) and download resources on workers’ rights in Egypt from Egypt Solidarity Initiative.



# Three years on, hundreds of protests mark student's murder in Egypt

## Egypt Solidarity

Campaigners, family and friends of murdered Cambridge PhD student Giulio Regeni took to the streets on the third anniversary of his death to demand justice for all of the thousands of people who have suffered forced disappearance and torture at the hands of the security forces in Egypt.

Giulio vanished in Cairo on 25 January 2016 while carrying out fieldwork for his PhD. His mutilated body was found on 2 February, bearing marks of torture. An investigation led by the judiciary in Giulio's home country of Italy has named 5 members of the Egyptian security forces as suspects in his kidnapping and murder.

At the exact time of the last known communication from Giulio, 6.41 pm on 25 January, thousands gathered in around 100 cities across Italy and in Cambridge, in vigils organised by Amnesty International. In a message which was read out at the vigils in Italy and in Cambridge, Giulio's parents thanked participants for continuing to mobilise to demand truth and justice.

"We feel the solidarity energy that surrounds us and that really helps us, an energy that does not forget Giulio and all the evil he suffered, like the many other victims in the world. We do not give up, neither for Giulio nor for all the Giulios and Giulias of Egypt. We continue to ask to know strongly and consistently: whoever it was, why he killed Giulio. Only by discovering these truths, will justice be done; for him and for all those who violently suffered for their human rights in body and in ideas."

The UCU union, which represents academic and academic-related staff in Higher and Further Education co-organised the UK-based campaign events with Amnesty. Vicky Knight, the union's national president, spoke at a further protest on 2 February outside the Egyptian embassy in London where friends of Giulio, UCU



Campaigners at the seminar in Cambridge | Photo: Anne Alexander

and Amnesty members gathered to hear speeches and poems and hand in a letter of protest.

"Over the past three years UCU has worked with our members and with Amnesty to highlight Giulio's case – and that of Egyptians who have suffered similar crimes. Meetings have been held on campus, online petitions have been signed and protests and vigils organised. And we will continue to shine a spotlight on the Egyptian regime – as we are doing today – until justice is served.

**"We must also challenge our own government who are shamefully one of the main apologists for the Sisi regime"**

But we must also challenge and criticise our own government who shamefully are one of the main apologists for the Sisi regime as well as the Bahraini, Saudi and Yemeni regimes to name but a few. It's a disgrace that UK arms sales to Egypt and elsewhere continue to rise while human rights abuses multiply."

The UCU branch in Cambridge worked with Amnesty activists to organise a seminar on 4 February which focussed on taking the campaign forward by linking up with UCU branches which are challenging university managers who want to do

deals with the Sisi regime in order to open international branch campuses in Egypt, despite ongoing abuses of human rights and violations of academic freedoms.

The seminar was addressed by former political prisoner Dr Taher Mokhtar, who was targeted by the regime after playing a leading role in campaigns over abuse and medical neglect of detainees. Taher described how he was also arrested in the annual security crackdown around the anniversary of the 25 January Revolution.

"After I was arrested, I was held in a tiny cell along with 30 other detainees, 28 of whom had suffered forced disappearance and torture with the aim of making them "confess" to crimes."

State prosecutors in Egypt are often complicit in torture, Taher explained. It is common for detainees to appear before prosecutors showing signs of torture along with a "confession" only to be told that unless they confirm the statement made under duress they would be returned to the custody of state security.

Jo McNeill, President of Liverpool University UCU, spoke about how a determined campaign led by her branch in collaboration with Cambridge UCU and Egypt Solidarity Initiative, had forced management to back away from plans to open an international branch campus in Egypt.

"Our VC signed a memorandum of



understanding which would allow more collaborative research with Egyptian academics – which we all support – but worryingly went on to agree to greater mobility to Egypt for our staff and students and the potential to open a UoL campus in Egypt.

We knew what had happened to Giulio Regeni and we were highly concerned that profit, as opposed to the guaranteed safety of our staff and students, was at the heart of this deal.

We contacted UCU colleagues at the University of Cambridge and worked with them to expose our concerns in the press. An open letter generated around 200 signatures from senior academics and others in a very short period of time. The letter was published in The Guardian. Fortunately, after this level of publicity from our campaign, the University of Liverpool have decided not to go ahead with an Egyptian campus.”

Other UK universities are pressing ahead with plans to open a campus in Egypt, however. Coventry University announced it is partnering with El Sewedy Education to open a branch campus in the New Administrative



Photo: Amnesty

Capital (see page 21-22 for more).

Jo urged UCU activists in universities where there are plans to open up Egypt campuses to consider launching campaigns similar to the one in Liverpool. “Collective campaigning works,” she said, “we do not want genuine, collaborative research with our Egyptian colleagues to end, if anything we need to work with them more to ensure their voices are heard

outside of their own country.

The main focus of the “Truth for Giulio Regeni” campaign is to keep a spotlight on the atrocities that took place and to ensure institutions are developing additional safety measures for anyone who has to visit Egypt as part of their work or research.”

[Go to Egypt Solidarity Initiative online for more on the campaign.](#)

## Activist reinstated by Dudley Council after false antisemitism claims

### Richard Donnelly

Palestine solidarity activists in the West Midlands have scored a victory for free speech on Israel after a council worker was reinstated following false accusations of antisemitism.

Paul Jonson, an anti-social behaviour officer at Dudley Council, was suspended after he made a Facebook post which called Israel a “racist endeavour”. A complaint was brought against him on the basis that the post contravened the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, which conflates criticism of Israel with anti-Jewish racism.

The IHRA definition has been

adopted by many local authorities across the UK, including Dudley Council, as well as by the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party. It states that claiming “the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour” is antisemitic. It attempts to prohibit supporters of Palestinian human rights from pointing to the ongoing process of ethnic cleansing that has taken place since the state’s foundation in 1948.

**“Equating criticism of Israel can only divide us in the fight against real antisemitism and the rise of the far right.”**

The attacks on Jonson were defeated after a campaign mobilised behind him. Some 800 people signing a statement of solidarity.

Jim Warner from Dudley Trades Council helped co-ordinate Jonson’s defence campaign. “We are pleased that common sense has prevailed,” he said. “Our campaign received tremendous support across the trade union and Labour movement. This was

an issue of basic trade union rights. However, we also believe that to equate criticism of Israel can only divide us in the fight against real antisemitism and the rise of the far right.”

With the apartheid regime in Israel increasingly isolated by the international outrage at its brutal blockade on the Gaza Strip and its massacres of protestors at the border fence, its supporters are often relying on conflation of advocacy of Palestinian human rights with antisemitism. This has led to high-profile smear campaigns against leading pro-Palestinian politicians, from Jeremy Corbyn in the UK to the US congresswoman Ilhan Omar.

As Paul Jonson noted in a statement on his reinstatement, his suspension was “never simply an individual disciplinary matter. This represented an attack on free speech and the right of trade unions to campaign over political issues, and an attempt to suppress solidarity with the Palestinian people.”

Jonson’s reinstatement shows that efforts to curtail the free speech of critics of Israel’s racist policies can be successfully resisted.





Hundreds of activists filled the British Museum during the protest | Photo: MES

## ‘No war, no warming’: activists protest BP sponsorship of exhibition

### MENA Solidarity

On Saturday 16 February 2019 activists gathered in British Museum. Groups of friends, parents, children, students, lifelong campaigners filtered into the main atrium, chatting, laughing, preparing. Around them, tourists, visitors and security were milling. At 2pm, all in black, what was dispersed groups became an organised block. Around 400 activists stood in lines, creating a black square in the middle of the entrance hall.

Two activists stepped forward, wearing red, with the slogan “I object to BP” written on their chests. A calm voice began singing “no war, no warming”, voices joined by voices joined by stamping feet and clapping

hands. The noise swelled until the entire sky-lit atrium was taken over by resistant sound. Suddenly, the activists turned around and pointed at a large sign advertising the exhibition I am Ashurbanipal, king of the world, king of Assyria and chanted “drop BP, drop BP, drop BP”.

The demonstration was organised by BP or not BP, a group about which one member of British Museum staff said: “they don’t half get in the way”. BP or not BP are an art activist group who oppose the sponsorship of major arts and cultural institutions by BP.

### BP has been a target of huge protests in Southern Iraq, as Iraqis rise up and demand their rights

This demonstration highlighted BP’s role in profiting from the US/UK invasion of Iraq while exposing the British Museum’s silence around the looting of many objects from modern-day Iraq. As the group explains:

“BP’s interest in Iraq stretches back a hundred years; from starting to go after its gigantic oil reserves in the

1910s – with the support of the British army, to operating the country’s biggest oilfield today. The company has also recently been one of the targets of huge protests near its Rumaila operation in Southern Iraq, as Iraqis rise up and demand their rights.”

BP, among other companies, profited from the 2003 invasion of Iraq: increased oil revenues were diverted to the giant corporations and imported goods were saved for the elite. Meanwhile, the majority of the population suffered from ruined infrastructure, public services, and damage to the environment. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis lost their lives while BP made a killing.

Activists slowly marched around the centre of the museum, unfurling a banner condemning BP and the British Museum. Four hundred, clad in black sat defiantly in front of the Ashurbanipal exhibition. There were speakers, clapping, cheering and theatre. The demonstrations ended outside the museum, on the steps. Hundreds of activists stood with banners. They will continue using art as resistance until divestment from climate change profiteers is achieved.



## BACK THESE CAMPAIGNS

### Egypt executes 9 after torture and unfair trials

The Egyptian authorities put nine young men to death on 20 February bringing the numbers killed in what Amnesty International has called a “bloody execution spree” this year to 15.

“The international community must not stay silent,” said Najia Bounaim, Amnesty International’s North Africa Campaigns Director. “Egypt’s allies must take a clear stand by publicly condemning the authorities’ use of the death penalty, the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.”



Islam al-Makkawi | Photo: FJP website

The nine were executed after unfair trials, and several of those convicted said that they had been tortured into making false confessions of guilt in connection with the assassination of the Egyptian Prosecutor General

in a car bomb attack in 2015. Islam al-Makkawi (24), Abu-Bakr al-Sayyid Abd-al-Magid (23), Mahmoud al-Ahmadi (23), Abd-al-Rahman Sulaiman Kahousk (27), Ahmad Haitham al-Hegazi (25), Ahmad Mahrous Sayyid (27), Abu-al-Qassim Ahmad Ali (25), Ahmad Gamal Hegazi (24), Ahmad Taha Wahdan (30) were mainly students, with the exception of Wahdan, a civil engineer.

Hundreds of other Egyptians remain on death row facing execution after similar experiences of torture and sham trials.

#### What you can do:

- **Send a letter of protest** to the Egyptian embassy demanding a halt to further executions
- **Go to Egypt Solidarity Initiative online** for background materials

### Sudanese activists appeal for trade union solidarity as repression grows

Hundreds of Sudanese activists have been participating in protests across Europe. London and Liverpool in the UK, alongside Paris, Berlin and other European cities have seen large mobilisations by Sudanese organisations calling for support for the protests. Dr Hashem Mukhtar is from the Alliance of Sudanese Political Forces in the UK.

“The revolution in Sudan is being led by the trade unions,” he says. “Our trade unions are composed of the alliance of the doctors, alliance of the lawyers, journalists, these are spearheading the revolution, and the uprising in Khartoum.

We would very much appreciate if the trade unions in the UK would collaborate with us, help us get the message to the UK public about what is going on in Sudan.

Sudan is a great country, it covers 1 million sq miles, the size of Western



Doctors are playing a key role in the struggle | Photo: SPA via Facebook

Europe, but we have the worst government, which has unfortunately been supported by some Western forces.

This dictatorship has to go. It is time to have our freedom and have our country back.”

UK trade unionists are already taking action in solidarity with their brothers and sisters in Sudan. Liverpool TUC, Liverpool University UCU and Stockport NEU have all passed motions demanding an end to UK support for El Bashir’s dictatorship.

A statement for trade unionists to sign has been launched by MENA Solidarity which has attracted support from leading activists in UCU, NEU and UNISON.

#### What you can do:

- **Sign the petition** to the UK parliament <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/236102>
- **Sign the solidarity statement** and find model motions and resources on the MENA Solidarity website. Go to [www.menasolidaritynetwork.com](http://www.menasolidaritynetwork.com)
- **Make a donation to the Sudan Rapid Response Team**, an initiative supported by the Sudan Doctors’ Union to provide treatment for injured protesters. Account holder: “The union”, Sort code 30 96 26 Account number 16326868 Please send an email with your organisation and amount of money transferred to [sdusec@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:sdusec@hotmail.co.uk)





Disabled activists join a protest in Tunisia in 2011 | Photo: Nasser Nouri

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**Strike**  
**إضراب**  
**Solidarity**  
**تضامن**

### MENA Solidarity

[menasolidaritynetwork.com](http://menasolidaritynetwork.com)

MENA Solidarity is a network of activists from different unions in the UK engaged in building solidarity for struggle to win social justice and workers' rights in the Middle East. We are supported by the UCU, PCS and NUT unions and a number of other trade union regions and branches.

**BAHRAIN WATCH**

### Bahrain Watch

[bahrainwatch.org](http://bahrainwatch.org)

Bahrain Watch is an independent research and advocacy organisation formed in February 2012 that seeks to promote effective, transparent and accountable governance in Bahrain.

**Egypt**  
**مصر**  
**SOLIDARITY**

### Egypt Solidarity

[egyptsolidarityinitiative.org](http://egyptsolidarityinitiative.org)

Egypt Solidarity launched on 11 February 2014, the third anniversary of the fall of Mubarak, in order to campaign in defence of democratic rights in Egypt.



# Israeli electoral rivalries stoke regional tensions

The Israeli general election scheduled for 9 April looks set to consolidate the hold of the hard-right over the country, argues **Richard Donnelly**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the contest in a bid to shut down indictment proceedings being brought against him, after Israeli police accused him of bribery and fraud. He hopes that winning a fifth term as Prime Minister will mean that it is politically impossible for the Israeli attorney general to prosecute him.

These hopes were dealt a serious blow in early March when the attorney general stated that he intended to bring serious charges against Netanyahu.

In a bid to distract from this cynical manoeuvre and to play to his image as a regional strongman, Netanyahu has stepped up Israeli military operations in Syria. Penetrating deep into Syrian territory, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) have launched deadly attacks against Iranian military units that have been deployed to assist President Assad in the Syrian Civil War.

Netanyahu faces stiff competition from Benny Gantz, the former Chief of Staff of the IDF. Lieutenant-General Gantz has sought to challenge Netanyahu's claims to be the candidate toughest on the Palestinian resistance, running his own election broadcasts in which he glories in his role in leading the Israeli military during their 2012 and 2014 onslaughts on Gaza.

While Netanyahu has led ultranationalist campaigns, such as engineering a racist panic over small numbers of East African refugees entering Israel, Gantz represents a more pragmatic wing of the Israeli establishment which has taken issue with some elements of the current government's strategy.

In particular, Gantz has taken aim at Netanyahu's Nation State Bill, which passed into law last year and stresses that only Jews have "the right to

exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel." While the main target of the law, which also de-recognises Arabic as an official language, are the Palestinians, Gantz has argued that the law undermines the important alliance between the Israeli state and the Druze community, who often serve in the IDF.

It's a sign of the continuing slide to the right in Israeli society that Netanyahu's Likud party has denounced Gantz as a "leftist." Three out of the top spots in Gantz's "Blue and White Alliance" electoral list are occupied by former heads of the Israeli Army. The other is reserved for Yair Lapid, former minister of Finance and the leader of the Yesh Atid party.

In truth, the Israeli Left has completely disintegrated under the pressures of the growing tide of extreme nationalism.

The Labour Party, which ruled Israel for the first 30 years after Israel came into existence, is now on course to win less than half-a-dozen of the 120 seats in the Israeli parliament, the Knesset.

The eclipse of Labour as a major political force reflects the end of the road for the two-state solution, which is now largely seen as implausible by both Israelis and Palestinians.

The promise of a Palestinian state, made a quarter-of-a-century ago during the Oslo Accords by the Labour Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, has been undermined by the arrival of hundreds of thousands of new Israeli settlers in the West Bank.

The demise of the two-state solution means that the security of the Israeli settler colony increasingly rests upon open military aggression against the Palestinian population. And as the bodies mount, so does the international outrage and the felt sense of isolation among Israelis.

Netanyahu has tried to overcome this isolation by aligning himself with other ultranationalist leaders around the world, such as Victor Orban in Hungary and Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro. In February, he unveiled an enormous billboard in central Tel Aviv which depicted him



Netanyahu meets Bolsonaro  
Photo: Wikimedia



Benny Gantz  
Photo: Wikimedia

shaking hand with Donald Trump.

In the long-term, Netanyahu's alignment with international far-right figures, his drive to military confrontation with Iran and his aggression against the Palestinians will cement the pariah state status of Israel on the global stage and compound its political shift to the right domestically.

