

The Occupy Movement and Democracy in Motion

By Arnold August, March 2012

Egypt and the U.S. Occupy Movement: Tales of Democracy

In November 2011, in the context of the Egyptian military regime's acts of violent repression against the people, White House spokesperson Jay Carney's responded to journalists' questions regarding the violence in Egypt similarly to how the White House had addressed it while Mubarak was still in power. Carney placed emphasis on faulting both sides — equally — for the violence, as was done under Mubarak. This was also the orientation carried out during the aftermath of the Honduran coup. The only difference now being that the elections in Egypt constituted a new ingredient to stop the pot from boiling over. In response to a journalist's question about "bloody, deadly rioting there [Egypt]," Carney said, "We call for *restraint on all sides*.... tragic events, rather, should not stand in the way of elections and a continued transition to democracy that is timely, peaceful, just and inclusive"¹ (emphasis added). The next day, given the persistence of the violent repression by the Egyptian military, Carney responded to a correspondent's challenge by declaring, "The violence is deplorable. We call on ... *all sides* to exercise restraint. We think it's very important that the elections go forward"² (emphasis added).

The Egyptian military, as a script, followed the same orientation as Washington, almost word for word: "The government urged citizens to keep self-restraint to restore stability as an initial step towards holding parliamentary elections."³ The same day, the revolt and the repression were of such intensity that the military had to issue another statement, admitting that "bloody clashes ... have rocked the nation's capitol [*sic*] ... [and] asked all national and political powers as well as citizens to *calm down* and create a stable climate to continue the *political process that will lead Egypt to democracy*"⁴ (emphasis added).

A journalist asked White House spokesperson Mark Toner in a late November 2011 press briefing "about some reports that the Egyptian military had been using tear gas — American-made tear gas — against the protesters." Toner responded, "We certainly would condemn the *misuse — any misuse of tear gas anywhere that could result in death or injury*"⁵ (emphasis added). The White House did not oppose the use of tear gas and repression, but only its *misuse*, as part of Washington's "collateral damage" theory.

In November–December 2011, tear gas and other means of police repression were used against the Occupy Movement in dozens of cities. Many people were injured and one almost killed when hit in the head by a tear gas canister. The Obama administration did not object to the indiscriminate and violent use of tear gas any more than it did in Tahrir Square. In order to protest against police repression, one of Obama’s public appearances was disrupted by militants of the Occupy Movement, raising the issue of police violence and the use of tear gas. As the activists were being removed, Obama said, “Listen, . . . I appreciate you guys making your point. Let me go ahead and make mine, all right? And I’ll listen to you, you listen to me.” However, Obama did not “listen”; he did not deal with the issue of police violence.⁶ He has completely avoided the police repression issue.

In the official White House transcript of the meeting, the specific complaints and demands of the Occupy people were not reproduced. Instead, the words “(Audience interruption.)” were inserted. Nevertheless, in the same speech, after the disruption, Obama *did* try to co-opt the Occupy Movement to his own advantage. The backdrop is the ever-present “two-party, competitive democratic system,” and the Eurocentric illusions about it. Obama said that for:

a lot of the folks who have been down in New York and all across the country, in the Occupy movement, there is a profound sense of frustration . . . about the fact that the essence of the American Dream — which is if you work hard, if you stick to it, that you can make it — feels like that’s slipping away. And it’s not the way things are supposed to be. Not here. Not in America.⁷

The arrests and repression against the Occupy Movement continued into January 2012. In a regular press briefing, White House spokesperson Jay Carney responded to a reporter’s question about the 400 arrests in Oakland. Carney said:

With regards to Oakland, that’s obviously a local law enforcement matter. . . . And our position has been and continues to be that we need to balance First Amendment concerns of the right to demonstrate, the right to speak freely, with public safety concerns and public health concerns.⁸

The question is: where is this balance? The ruling circles have the political power and use it to repress those who oppose the status quo. “Public safety concerns” are domestic applications of the pretext the U.S. fabricates and employs in the international arena to invade countries.

Occupy Detroit was one of the very few that took a principled stand on the anniversary of the Egyptian rebellion while pinpointing the role of the U.S. Thus, they went beyond the limits imposed by U.S.-centric illusions of the Obama administration, posting on their site, “This rally is a protest of U.S. military aid to Egypt’s brutal and oppressive military dictatorship.”⁹ Occupy Chicago was one of the other few that marked the anniversary: “Egyptian & Egyptian Solidarity Groups Rally to Support Egyptian Revolution’s Demands on the Anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution.” However, unlike their Detroit counterparts, they shied away from zeroing in on the role of the Obama administration in propping up the military regime. The Obama administration supported Mubarak right to the end of his reign. The U.S. since then provides military and political back-up to the military regime. For example, in March 2012, a senior State Department official told CNN that Obama’s Secretary of State Hillary Clinton “will issue a national security waiver allowing \$1.3 billion in foreign military financing to flow again to the Cairo government.” All the funds go to U.S. firms holding contracts to supply U.S. military and defence equipment, weapons and training to Egypt.¹⁰ Despite this, Occupy Chicago created illusions about the possible “support of their [U.S.] government to the Egyptian revolution.”¹¹ Occupy Oakland organized an Egyptian solidarity march on the anniversary, but limited the demands to the “US corporate production and sale of the tear gas used in Egypt,” evacuating the role of the Obama administration.¹²

Occupy AIPAC: A Major Breakthrough

Occupy AIPAC was a series of events aimed at putting a spotlight on the abusive practices of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the major U.S. Zionist lobby group. The events were timed to coincide with the annual AIPAC Policy Conference, scheduled for March 2–6, 2012, in Washington, D.C., Occupy AIPAC provides the following facts:

#1: Between the years 1949 and 2010, the United States granted \$61.3 billion in military aid to Israel.

#2: A whopping \$30 billion in U.S. military aid has been promised to Israel for the years 2009 to 2018.

#3: Approximately 500,000 Israeli settlers live within the occupied Palestinian territory in violation of international law.

#4: There are approximately four million Palestinians living under Israeli occupation in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza, according to 2007 census figures compiled by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and reported in Ha'aretz.

#5: Between September 29, 2000, and August 31, 2010, 1,084 Israelis were killed by Palestinians, including 124 minors. During the same period, 6,408 Palestinians were killed by Israelis, including 1,315 minors.... Israel's military dominance is largely a result of U.S. largesse through military aid, as well as access to sophisticated U.S.-designed military technology.

#6: Weapons purchased by Israel using U.S. military aid are used against civilians in violation of U.S. laws.¹³

Occupy AIPAC was extremely active and courageous in standing up to the Zionists. For example, they spread into Brandeis University (Massachusetts), timing this with the Washington, D.C., AIPAC Conference. Their goal was to oppose the Zionist policies in the Middle East as well as their attempts to stifle dissent in the U.S. among the many people of Jewish origin who oppose Zionism. The Occupy AIPAC press release declared, "Young Jewish activist disrupts AIPAC panel about 'Israel on Campus': Stop Silencing Dissent and Supporting Settlement Expansion." Liza Behrendt is a twenty-two-year-old member of Young, Jewish, and Proud, the youth wing of Jewish Voice for Peace. She stood up during a breakout session "to call attention to the silencing of Palestinians — and young Jews who support them — on U.S. campuses." She and others also opposed war with Iran and settlement expansion in the West Bank, and supported the Palestinians.

Their press release was co-sponsored by CODEPINK: Women for Peace and endorsed by Occupy Wall Street, Occupy DC and more than 130 organizations, including Jewish Voice for Peace, Interfaith Peace Builders, Jews Say No, Just Foreign Policy, US Palestinian Community Network and the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation.¹⁴

Occupy AIPAC issued an “Open Letter to Student Delegates at the 2012 AIPAC Policy Conference,” on March 1, 2012. Occupy AIPAC wrote in their communiqué that they support the revolt of the Egyptian people against the dictator Mubarak and denounce the war in Iraq, “which has killed nearly 4,500 young Americans and well over 100,000 civilian Iraqis.” They reiterated their opposition to AIPAC’s policy of opposing dissent “to silence criticism of Israel by fueling an environment in which critics of Israeli policy are labeled ‘anti-Semitic,’ ‘de-legitimizers’ or ‘self-hating Jews.’”¹⁵

Occupy AIPAC was increasingly entrenching itself into the very heart of the problem: U.S. wars of aggression and, domestically, what Chomsky calls “manufacturing consent.” On their signs and banners in front of the AIPAC Conference, they did not mince words: “No War on Iran,” “Peace with Iran,” “Stop Israeli War Crimes,” “Israel=Apartheid.”¹⁶

At the same time, the virus of liberalism had infected the Occupy AIPAC Movement. They seemed to be moving beyond the limits of U.S.-centric prejudices. This is noticeable especially in the restriction to limit the movement to the excessive greed of the bankers; Occupy AIPAC also opposed imperialist war and defence expenditures. However, one theme continually emerged. They created the illusion that the U.S. administrations, whether Bush regarding Iraq or Obama at the time with respect to Iraq and Iran, are “victims” of AIPAC. The impression is given that Obama and the U.S. political system can listen to reason and, in turn, motivate Israel positively. In the case of Obama, their position is part of the unfortunate — and dangerous — residue emerging from the false impression that the 2008 elections represented competition between change and status quo, between liberals and conservatives.

Occupy AIPAC writes that “Obama needs to talk sense to Netanyahu when he meets him on Monday”¹⁷ and that AIPAC “maintains a stranglehold over US policies.”¹⁸ The goal of the weeklong actions undertaken by Occupy AIPAC was

to urge Obama to reject the Israeli administration’s push for war on Iran and insist on respect for Palestinian rights.... [and] draw attention to the role of AIPAC as a special interest lobby that maintains a stranglehold over US policies.¹⁹

These assertions, even though well-intentioned, contradict their own statements, whereby they indicate clearly how the U.S.

heavily subsidizes the Israeli military. The U.S. is not a junior partner of Israel. The U.S. seeks world domination through war. Israel is part of that machine. Israel is the U.S. pistol in the entire Middle East. It is normal to an extent that there is confusion on this issue because of the slick-talking Obama and the media enveloping him in an aura of “change.” This is why the U.S. elite chose Obama in the first place in 2008: his ability to co-opt even the slightest opening of hope for peace in order to disguise the U.S. war plans until it is too late.

It is pertinent to examine the Obama and Netanyahu statements during the period of the AIPAC Conference. They show that the Occupy Movement cannot harbour any more illusions and, instead, prepares for an alternative to the entire system, while in the immediate does everything in its power to pressure the U.S. not to go to war against Iran, as at least Occupy AIPAC is doing.

At the Washington Conference sponsored by AIPAC, Obama said that the United States and Israel share

A belief that freedom is a right that is given to all of God’s children. An experience that shows us that democracy is the one and only form of government that can truly respond to the aspirations of citizens.

America’s Founding Fathers understood this truth, just as Israel’s founding generation did.²⁰

Obama went on to declare “My administration’s commitment to Israel’s security has been unprecedented. Our military and intelligence cooperation has never been closer. . . . *Despite a tough budget environment, our security assistance has increased every single year.*” Obama said, “We will do what it takes to preserve Israel’s qualitative military edge — because Israel must always have the ability to defend itself, by itself, against any threat.” “Now, our assistance is expanding Israel’s defensive capabilities”²¹ (emphasis added). Regarding Iran, he said “Now is the time to heed the timeless advice from Teddy Roosevelt: Speak softly; carry a big stick.”²²

Obama is referring to U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt’s corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, “Speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far.” For further information, see Chapter 2 of my book. I write about the Monroe Doctrine and President Theodore Roosevelt’s corollary to it, as well as about his successor, President Taft: “Therefore, even President Taft’s pretext for extension throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, in his

own words, ‘by virtue of our *superiority of race*,’ was an outgrowth of the previous doctrines”²³ (emphasis added).

The big stick is far more evident than speaking softly. In the same speech, Obama said, listing what can be termed the “speaking softly” approaches, that is, diplomacy (which includes crippling sanctions against Iran) combined with the “big stick,” that

I will take no options off the table, and I mean what I say. (Applause.) That includes all elements of American power: A political effort aimed at isolating Iran; a diplomatic effort to sustain our coalition and ensure that the Iranian program is monitored; an economic effort that imposes crippling sanctions; and, yes, a military effort to be prepared for any contingency. (Applause.)²⁴

Netanyahu got the picture loud and clear, namely that it is the “big stick” option that counts. After Obama’s speech, Netanyahu issued a statement expressing appreciation for Obama’s position that all options are on the table to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. Netanyahu also said, regarding Obama’s latest points on Iran–Israel, “Perhaps most important of all, I appreciated the fact that he said that Israel must be able to defend itself, by itself, against any threat.”²⁵

The next day, in a joint press conference accorded by Obama and Netanyahu, Obama talked about “the democratic transition that’s taking place in Egypt. And in the midst of this, we have an island of democracy and one of our greatest allies in Israel.”²⁶ How can anyone have any illusions that Obama is a friend of the Egyptian people and is a judge of democracy? Obama repeated his “big stick” priority in reference to Iran: “And we do not want a regime that has been a state sponsor of terrorism ... when I say all options are at the table, I mean it.”²⁷ Furthermore, Obama made it clear that Israel and the U.S. are working hand-in-glove when he lauded the “unprecedented levels” of “coordination and consultation between our militaries and our intelligence not just on this issue [Iran].”²⁸

Despite the impression given, Netanyahu knows that he can count on Obama irrespective of what Israel does, if the two countries are not actually coordinating an impending aggression against Iran. If Netanyahu nurtured any doubts, he would *not* have said in the same press conference, “Thank you ... for that strong

speech yesterday,” referring to Obama’s “big stick” comment. Netanyahu went on to say that

For them [Iranians], you’re the Great Satan, we’re the Little Satan. For them, we are you and you’re us. And you know something, Mr. President — at least on this last point, I think they’re right. We are you, and you are us. We’re together.”²⁹

Therefore, there is no reason to harbour any illusions that the U.S. is manipulated by AIPAC or Israel. As Netanyahu admitted, Israel is the Little Satan, and the U.S. is the Great Satan.

Occupy AIPAC will achieve a breakthrough only once the illusions regarding the U.S. political system and its democracy have been discarded, thus paving the way for an alternative that is able to foster anti-war policies. At the same time, all actions against U.S. war preparations are crucial to stopping a disaster. This brings us to the next section in this article.

The danger of liberal illusions about the U.S. “democratic, two-party, competitive system” can lead to fascism domestically and abroad. The Occupy Movement is perhaps the most important event in the last 40 years. The democratization at the base is objectively in opposition to the democracy based on the needs of Wall Street, the 1 percent, and the military–industrial complex. However, if the virus of liberalism blunts this contradiction, it can open the floodgates to fascism. In this sense, Samir Amin raises some important red flags. The U.S. extreme Protestantism based on individual private-property accumulation and morality “made a strong impression on American ideology which has continued right up to the present.” The U.S. sees itself as the “chosen people,” a divine mission mandated by the Bible to conquer. The “chosen people” is “a synonym in actual events for Nazi Germany’s *Herrenvolk*” (master race). Amin holds that “American imperialism has to be more barbaric than its predecessors, who did not proclaim themselves to have been given a divine mission.”³⁰

Many may not agree with Amin. However, it is worthwhile to think back and accumulate everything that the U.S. has done since World War II. This includes Hiroshima and Nagasaki; in China through its puppets; elsewhere in Asia, such as the war against Vietnam; the conflicts and starvation provoked in Africa; the innumerable assassinations and tortures carried out in Latin America; the openly declared objective of the genocidal policy against Cuba through the blockade; the most recent events in Iraq

and Afghanistan; and the genocidal activities of its ally, Israel, against the Palestinian people since 1948. There are many more on the international scale, too numerous to mention. Domestically, there is the inherent racism of the U.S. state resulting today in mass incarceration of African-Americans and racism against Latinos. This current U.S. state finds its origins in slavery and the genocide of the Indigenous peoples. There is also the most dangerous of all challenges to humanity, along with nuclear weapons, of which the U.S. is by far the most important possessor. I am referring to the environment, the U.S. being by far the largest per capita polluter, while refusing to abide by international norms to stop this plague.

Given this situation, it is far more prudent to take seriously the warning that the U.S. is, and can be, more barbaric than the Nazis, rather than ignore this threat and fall prey to illusions. Just think about what Amin writes, “The military power of the United States has been systematically constructed since 1945, covering the entire planet.” It uses NATO as its military arm. Amin’s book was written in 2004. This was before the U.S. increased the use of the United Nations to carry out a war against Libya and other countries, while even more blatantly ignoring it when it takes a stand in opposition to U.S. interests. Amin wrote that “the United Nations is already treated by the United States, with the complicity of others, like the League of Nations was treated by the fascist states not long ago.” Furthermore,

equality among people has been replaced by the distinction between a “master race” or *Herrenvolk* — the people of the United States and behind them, the people of Israel — and other peoples.... The militarist option of the United States threatens everyone. It arises from the same logic as Hitler’s.³¹

Amin’s conclusion is very apt for consideration by the Occupy Movements in the U.S. and elsewhere in Canada and Europe:

To bring the militarist project of the United States to defeat has become the primary task, the major responsibility, for everyone.... If Europeans had reacted in 1935 or 1937, they would have succeeded in stopping the Hitlerite madness. By reacting only in September 1939, they allowed dozens of millions of victims to have that madness inflicted on them. We must act sooner rather than later to face the challenge of Washington’s neo-Nazis.³²

Even though I believe that, if fascism comes to the U.S., it would *not* follow the same political path as Nazi Germany, nor exhibit the same form, it will be a twenty-first-century fascism, as outlined in another article below in this website, entitled “The Red Herring in Two-Party Politics and the Danger of Fascism.” However, the content remains the same: military aggression and world war. Chapter 2 of my book also addresses this issue of the drive for foreign domination.

African-Americans and the Occupy Movement

The purpose of this third and last section of my article, “The Occupy Movement and Democracy in Motion” is to make known other opinions on some controversial issues. The goal is to contribute to the debate and widen horizons on the issues of democratization. Of special interest is to foster more awareness about the dangers posed by U.S.-centrism regarding democracy.

The first three articles cited below are from the *Black Agenda Report*. They deal with different issues regarding the level of involvement of African-Americans in the Occupy Movement, its causes and effects. The first one is entitled “Occupy Where? What’s In It for Black and Brown People?”³³ *Black Agenda Report* Executive Director Glen Ford writes his piece “The Need for a Black Agenda,” mainly in reaction to the negative influences of “Obamism,” which affects the political life of African-Americans.³⁴ Dr. Jared A. Ball is an associate professor of Communication Studies at Morgan State University in Baltimore and author, whose article “Occupy These...! Slavery and Abuse by Metaphor” is very thought-provoking.³⁵

Black Agenda Report Managing Editor Bruce A. Dixon, in his piece entitled “Black America Paralyzed, Powerless, Irrelevant: Year 4 of the Obama Era,” paints a bleak picture but is probably very close to reality:

Black protest, and black America[,] used to be where the left lived. Black America used to be the visible, beating heart of the American left, in permanent opposition to wars of imperial conquest, to despoiling the environment, to gutting social security and Medicaid. Those days are over.³⁶

This situation is related to the main feature of the “two-party, competitive election” system of democracy in the U.S. as

explained in Chapter 2 of my book. Pure presidential, political opportunism in the form of Obama combines with his ability to co-opt in order to maintain the status quo. This saved the day, so far, for the ruling circles. It has to be admitted that the ruling elite is very conscious and far-sighted in choosing their point man. One could imagine what the Occupy Wall Street Movement would be like if Obama were not the president. It may have spelled disaster for the status quo.

The Obama phenomenon prevents an important section of the African-American masses from participating as they usually did in crucial points in U.S. history. However, as Glen Ford points out, this does not mean that African-American political opportunists are not at work in trying to co-opt African-Americans through the Wall Street Movement in support of Obama's re-election.³⁷ By so doing, they are postponing for years to come an alternative to the two-party system. The prolific author Paul Street writes in his ZNET Space,

Ironically enough, Obama now gets to channel the populist Occupy spirit in fashioning his campaign for re-election against (in all likelihood) the spectacularly wealthy Mitt Romney. A web blurb from the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee says "Stand with President Obama: the top 1% Need to Pay Their Fair Share!"³⁸

Street's article is another confirmation of the importance of co-optation in U.S. politics. It would never work if the U.S.-centric-encouraged self-confidence about the inevitable durability of the U.S. political system were to be put aside in search of an alternative.

Margaret Flowers and Kevin Zeese were among the original organizers of Occupy Washington, D.C., and are currently among the organizers of the National Occupation of Washington, D.C. They authored an important piece in the *Black Agenda Report* based on numerous interviews and field research concerning "Infiltration to Disrupt, Divide and Mis-Direct are Widespread in Occupy."³⁹

My goal in this supplement to my book is to contribute to the debate on democracy in motion in order to widen horizons on different types of democracy.

As far as the Occupy Movement is concerned, the issue is political power, that of the 1 percent or of the vast majority. Whether one or the other, they cannot really co-exist. For this

reason, I agree with the suggestion raised by Michael Parenti, as part of the overall program, to work toward a new Constitution.⁴⁰ It is of significance and deserves serious reflection and debate.

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² ———. 2011b. “Press Gaggle by Jay Carney en Route Manchester, New Hampshire.” White House (November 22). At <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/22/press-gaggle-jay-carney-en-route-manchester-new-hampshire>>.

³ Egypt State Information Service. 2011a. “Sharaf Governor Submits Resignation.” (November 22). At <<http://www.sis.gov.eg/En/Story.aspx?sid=59047>>.

⁴ ———. 2011b. “SACF Calls for Urgent Dialogue.” (November 22). At <<http://www.sis.gov.eg/En/Story.aspx?sid=59046>>.

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⁶ Obama, Barack. 2011. “Remarks by the President on the American Jobs Act.” White House (November 22). At <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/22/remarks-president-american-jobs-act>>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Carney. 2012. “Press Briefing.” (January 30). At <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/01/30/press-briefing-press-secretary-jay-carney-13012>>.

⁹ Occupy Detroit. 2012. “Occupy Detroit Is Holding a March & Rally in Solidarity With the Egyptian Revolution.” (January 25). At <<http://www.occupy-detroit.us/2012/01/20/jan-25-egyptian-revolution-solidarity-march-and-rally/>>.

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¹¹ Occupy Chicago. 2012. “Egyptian & Egyptian Solidarity Groups Rally to Support Egyptian Revolution's Demands on the Anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution.” (January 20). At <<http://occupychi.org/press/blog/2012/01/20/sat-121-chicago-marches-global-day-support-egyptian-revolution>>.

¹² Occupy Oakland. 2012. “Finance Proposal for January 24th Egyptian Solidarity March.” (January 18). At <<http://occupyoakland.org/2012/01/18-for-11812-ga-finance-proposal-for-january-24th-egyptian-solidarity-march/>>.

¹³ Occupy AIPAC. n.d. “About: What Is Occupy AIPAC?” At <<http://www.occupyaipac.org/about/>>.

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- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Taft. 2009, op. cit.
- ²⁴ Obama. 2012a, op. cit.
- ²⁵ CNN. 2012, op. cit.
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- ²⁹ Ibid.
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- ³² Ibid., p. 83, 85.
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