The regime strikes back
Regional powers plot counter-revolution in Sudan

Algeria: the storm breaks
Where next for the popular movement?

Last stand of the Syrian rebellion?
The battle for Idlib will not bring peace

‘We will not be party to a war atrocity’
Genoa dockers stop Saudi ship unloading

Saudi women speak out
Challenges to male guardianship system are growing
**Gosh vs Kandaka**

by Khalid Albaih

Khalid is a Sudanese artist and political cartoonist that was born in Bucharest, Romania in 1980. In this image, Alaa Salah, whose image caught the attention of the world on social media as she led chants outside the General Command sit-in in Khartoum, is taking on Salah Gosh, the feared head of the National Intelligence and Security Services.

Read more about how you can buy a poster of Khalid’s work through our Sudan Art Appeal on pages 24-25
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A wildcat strike by Italian dockers blocked military equipment from reaching Saudi Arabia. **Gianni Del Panta** speaks one of the strike organisers from Genoa’s autonomous dockers’ organisation, the **Collettivo Autonomo Lavoratori Portuali**.

Dockers in the Italian port city of Genoa are organising against the Saudi regime’s war on Yemen, twice blocking the unloading of equipment. The threat of a strike on 20 June forced shipping agency Delta to suspend the loading of 8 generators on the Saudi ship **Bahri Jazan**. The action on 20 June followed a successful strike on 20 May when dockers prevented the **Bahri Yanbu** from loading military equipment, eventually forcing the vessel to leave the port without its cargo.

This action has reinvigorated a long-standing militant tradition of international solidarity among Italian workers, as the Genoa dockers are working to coordinate future actions with dockers in Naples and Trieste. It also challenges the narrative that workers are racist, self-interested and reactionary. The story testifies that a well-organised and conscious working class can gain the upper hand against racism and xenophobic attitudes by counterposing them to principles of social justice, internationalism and solidarity.

**How did you mobilise?**

The spark that ignited the prairie was what happened in Le Havre. We became aware that dockers in the French port refused to load the same ship – the now “famous” **Bahri Yanbu** – just a few days before. We started talking to one another during and after our shifts and a widespread feeling emerged – no worker wanted to load weapons or military equipment intended to kill civilians somewhere in the world.

To organise the protest, we called a public assembly on 17 May, three days before the ship was expected to dock in the port of Genoa. We held the meeting in a hall which is historically symbolic for the dockers, as it was the starting point for several great struggles in previous decades.

The scale of participation in the assembly was unexpected. There were dozens of workers and militants in the hall. Moreover, various associations and several
leftist political parties joined the meeting.

The large numbers of activists at the assembly put pressure on the mainstream unions from below. They were forced to call a strike on 20 May from 6am until noon. The mobilisation led by the Collective was important, fuelling a situation where the trade union confederations found themselves in a particularly difficult position. Either they could support the strike or risk losing contact with the workers. For obvious reasons, they chose the latter.

On 20 May, we got up very early, as usual, when the rest of the city was still sleeping. Expectations and fears were extraordinarily high that morning. It was a relief to see that the docks were already full of people before 6 o’clock in the morning. At least 60 workers joined the strike. They were also supported by several other militants, who held a banner reading “close the ports to weapons, open the ports to migrants”. The strike and a demonstration with the use of smoke bombs was a great success. The loading of the ship did not even start. And after two days, Bahri Yanbu left the port without any military equipment.

Tell us more about the Collective

The Collective has a long history. It was formed for the first time in the early 1970s. It re-emerged on many occasions, especially at the height of workers’ struggles. When we decided to recreate the Collective in the early 2010s, the attempt was to keep the tradition of the working class movement in the docks of Genoa vital and alive. The Collective is not only interested in fostering militant consciousness among workers, but also in participating in political activities in a broader sense. For instance, we took part in the sit-in called against the presence of CasaPound – a fascist organization – in Genoa on 23 May.

During the strike did you receive solidarity from other workers?

Yes. By far, the most important act was the communique issued by dockworkers in Marseille. They had come to know about our strike and mobilised in a very similar way, blocking the loading of weapons. In this regard, class struggle and international solidarity flew from France to Italy – that is, from Le Havre to Genoa – and then back to France, whilst the two countries are currently competing to control Libya in a new imperialist battle.

There were also train drivers who operated in the dock and truckers who were waiting to board who showed solidarity with us in several ways. It was great to know that we were not alone.

How did the authorities react?

In the very first hours of the strike, police officers were anxious, dealing with an unusual situation. Once they understood that they were not the target of our action in any way, they calmed down. Something similar happened with the Port Authority. In contrast, the reaction of the governor of the region, Giovanni Toti, was rather different. Formally, he is still one of the leading figures of Silvio Berlusconi’s own Forza Italia party.

Yet, due to the rapid decomposition of the party, Toti is repositioning himself in a position much closer to the extreme right party led by Matteo Salvini, La Lega. The governor publicly attacked us on the social media. We responded and also posted an open letter by a worker – who is not part of the Collective – on our Facebook page. In any case, the simple fact that Toti thought it necessary to engage with dockworkers on social media represented a clear victory for our mobilisation.

What are the next steps?

We know that there are 10 armoured trucks in a storage here in the dock in Genoa. We do not want to be a party to war atrocities in Yemen, or elsewhere in the world. Thus, we will try to block any attempt to load military equipment as vessel cargoes. Beyond international solidarity with a population under siege, there are also important issues of safety here. For us, it is much riskier to load weapons rather than other goods. In any case, we will keep you updated.

Gianni del Panta is an Italian activist. Send messages of solidarity the Collettivo Autonomo via their Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/pg/Collettivo-Autonomo-Lavoratori-Portuali-1002559709815150/
Read more about the impact of the Saudi-led war on the people of Yemen overleaf
Court win boosts battle to stop Saudi arms sales

Since the start of the bombing of Yemen in March 2015, the UK has licensed over £4.6 billion worth of arms to Saudi Arabia, according to Campaigns Against Arms Trade (CAAT).

This trade is unlawful, the Court of Appeal ruled on 20 June in response to a case brought by CAAT, as ministers turned a blind eye to the use of British weapons against civilians.

Saudi Arabia is one of the main members of the coalition, along with the US and the UAE, engaged against the Houthis forces, who are supported by Iran.

The court’s decision comes after a long campaign by CAAT and others to expose the real role of the British government in fuelling the war on Yemen.

A Channel 4 Dispatches documentary aired in April 2019 revealed that the UK is playing a far more direct part in the conflict than the UK Government wants to admit.

Not only is the UK supplying Saudi Arabia with weapons and aircraft, but it also sends officers to help train the Saudi military to maintain their weapons, whilst also providing advice on selecting missile targets.

However, as a former BAE technician testified: “we are supposed to train the Saudis, but they’re not there to be trained a lot of the time. We have to do all their work, from the ground up. The Brits don’t touch the bombs, but that’s the final 5 percent. If you didn’t do the 95 percent, that final 5 percent could not happen”.

“Halting military exports would be morally bankrupt and the people of Yemen would be the biggest losers”

Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt

For years, ministers have pushed the lie that their ties with the Saudi regime and its allies somehow benefit ordinary people in Yemen.

“We could halt our military exports and sever the ties that British governments of all parties have carefully preserved for decades, as critics are urging,” foreign secretary Jeremy Hunt declared in an article in Politico in March 2019.

“That would be morally bankrupt and the people of Yemen would be the biggest losers”.

Yet Yemeni women activists Dalia, Laila and Aisha are very clear that stopping the war must be a priority for the international community and demand the suspension of arms sales to all warring parties.

The three women are from Hudaydah in the north west of Yemen, and work for local organisations. Yemeni women, who are particularly affected by the war, play a leading role in increasing the resilience of their communities, contributing to local peacebuilding, assisting affected citizens and working towards the reconstruction of Yemen.

International governments and aid organisations are failing to work directly with local groups to plan humanitarian programmes, the women say. Leila and Dalia also highlight the worsening economic situation of the country.

The war has resulted in economic collapse reducing people’s monthly income to $75. This is barely above
the international poverty threshold, set at US$1.90 a day by the United Nations. Dalia reports that 80 percent of the fishermen in the area of Aden are unable to fish. They cannot access ports embargoed by the Houthis and the Saudi-led coalition and face high fuel prices for boats and generators. Airstrikes are also targeting fishing boats.

A report published by LSE Middle East Centre in December 2018 revealed that the fishing industry in Yemen provides a livelihood for almost 36,000 fishermen.

Huda (not her real name), an internally displaced person from Sa’ada in north west Yemen and mother of eight, lost everything after her house was hit by airstrikes.

The war has resulted in economic collapse and reduced people’s monthly income to $75

Oxfam advised her on setting up a business and she now earns an income by selling women’s clothes.

“Now I am able to buy food for my family. I have also bought school items and winter clothes for my children and, for the first time in a long time, I was able to pay my house rent,” Huda said.

Dalia, Laila and Aisha call for the integration of women into peace talks. Leila points to the high level of women’s participation in Yemen’s National Dialogue Conference in 2013-4 as an example.

Women made up over a quarter of the participants, contributing to positive outcomes for local communities and families, with specific attention given to families of martyrs and the wounded.

Additional reporting by Anne Alexander

Dalia, Laila and Aisha were speaking at an online seminar organised by Oxfam. Search Oxfam’s Yemen Crisis Appeal to find out more and donate. Go to www.caat.org.uk to find out more about the Stop Arming Saudi campaign.

EGYPT

Morsi murdered by medical neglect

Egypt Solidarity

Former Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi collapsed and died in court on 17 June, highlighting the appalling conditions faced by the tens of thousands of political prisoners held by Abdelfattah al-Sisi’s military regime.

Morsi was elected president representing the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Freedom and Justice Party in 2012, during a brief period of relative democratic openness, when the army and security services were still reeling from the impact of the January 2011 uprising.

He was overthrown by the military the following year, arrested and charged in numerous cases.

In the bloody repression which followed the military coup, around 1000 protesters were slaughtered by the army and security forces at sit-ins in Raba’a and Al-Nahda Squares in Cairo, and tens of thousands of supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood were thrown into jail.

“Morsi faced death more than once in prison, as the authorities refused to provide him with appropriate food for his diabetes”

The crackdown quickly widened to draw in opponents across the political spectrum, while the regime resorted to enforced disappearances, torture and extrajudicial executions to consolidate its grip on power.

Human rights activist Ashraf Ameen told Egypt Solidarity, “Morsi faced death more than once in prison, as the prison authorities refused to provide him with appropriate food for his diabetes. This is why he fell into a coma so quickly.

His death has shocked people all over the world: meetings and conferences have been held where participants expressed their anger and deep sorrow for this steadfast man who was oppressed by the whole world.

Hundreds of prayers were also held in a large number of mosques around the world after being banned by Al-Sisi’s criminal regime in Egypt.”

Hundreds of protesters held a vigil outside the Egyptian embassy in London on 21 June to remember Morsi and call for justice for Egypt’s political prisoners.

“People gathered from the countries of the Arab Spring and Muslim countries such as Bangladesh and Malaysia,” Egyptian activist Mohamed Saeed told us.


Speakers from around the Arab world called for unity to confront the military occupation by the Arab armies which are under the control of Western colonialism.”

The vigil was supported by Stop the War Coalition, Muslim Association of Britain and a range of other organisations.
Teachers and medical students lead new wave of protest
Mehdi Rafiq

More than 13,000 students from medical schools in Morocco have been on strike continuously from their studies since March.

These national protests erupted after the Ministry of Higher Education issued a new set of regulations for the training of doctors, dentists and pharmacists, which included clauses that students considered detrimental to the principle of equal opportunities.

Students also reject the privileges granted by the state to private medical schools. The Moroccan government is encouraging the private sector to invest in medical training while the public medical, dentistry and pharmacy schools suffer from problems of overcrowding, weak training programmes and the lack of teachers.

The medical students’ struggle has won solidarity from large sections of the population who deplore the deterioration of the health service as a result of growing privatisation and the decline of state support for this social sector.

Despite some concessions from the Ministries of Higher Education and Health on 9 June, the students continued their strike and took the decision to boycott examinations held on 10 June, following a unanimous vote by delegates at the medical students’ general assembly.

Police surrounded the examination halls, and were met with protest vigils organised by the students’ families to denounce the government’s failure to meet their childrens’ demands.

Having failed to impose its policies, the government has resorted to accusations against the Justice and Charity movement (the largest Islamist opposition party) of being behind the medical students’ struggle.

The medical students’ movement comes after a wave of protests by teachers confronting casualisation in the spring. Fifty-five thousand teachers on temporary contracts took to the streets on Rabat on Saturday 23 March.

Teachers raised slogans against the system of casualised contracts which links them to “regional educational and training academies”.

Their campaign takes place against the backdrop of a draft law currently being debated by Parliament which provides for family contributions to the cost of education.

The Moroccan authorities resorted to violence against protesting teachers on the night of 23 March during the sit-in outside the parliament building. Using water cannons in order to disperse protesters, they also charged the sit-in several times.

Teachers were quick to respond to the terrible repression of their peaceful sit-in, as the National Contract Teachers’ Coordination Committee announced a strike by teachers forced onto temporary contracts for six days from 25 March, alongside regional sit-ins.

Like the medical students, teachers have been building democratic organisation to lead their strikes.

The National Contract Teachers’ Coordination Committee is an independent, self-governing, mobilising body.

It depends on local coordination committees in different cities to mobilise, and regional coordinating bodies in Morocco’s twelve regions.

Mehdi Rafiq is a Moroccan activist.
LAST STAND OF THE SYRIAN REBELLION?

The Assad regime’s brutal assault on Idlib and Hama may bring temporary military victory, says Abdulsalam Dallal, but the massacres it is committing will not be forgotten.

Syria is back in the news. The Assad regime and its allies including Russia launched a massive military campaign on the northern Hama countryside and Idlib province in May, targeting residential areas and hospitals, forcing hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes and take shelter in olive tree fields.

Most news agencies have already warned that a humanitarian disaster could take place if the offensive does not stop. The regime seeks to justify the offensive using “anti-terrorist” propaganda.

However, we must remember that this has been the regime’s narrative since the beginning of the Syrian revolution in March 2011. Throughout the past eight years, the regime and its allies have managed the conflict and alternating periods of direct targeting of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and other rebel factions with long periods of siege warfare which froze the frontlines.

The regime has consistently exercised collective punishment of civilians by siege and bombardment. Many of the
Syrian regime’s supporters in the media repeatedly complained that the “social incubators” of the opposition were as dangerous as the militants, offering a pretext to justify the killing of civilians.

However, in order to spare itself and its allies costly battles on the ground, the regime has sometimes attempted to find local political solutions.

They launched the so-called “national reconciliation” protocol, through which the opposition surrendered terrain to the Assad army and its allies.

### The regime has consistently exercised collective punishment of civilians by siege and bombardment.

This “reconciliation with the regime” took place in the southern city of Dera’a and the towns of the Damascus countryside, following months of siege and bombardment of these areas which exhausted the civilian population and pressurised the opposition fighters to accept this solution.

This tactic was adopted after a first experiment in mid-2016 during the siege of Aleppo.

However, the regime would later forcibly recruit those fighters to its army so they would serve as cannon fodder on other frontlines.

Moreover, the Assad regime started detaining and torturing opposition members who were wanted by one or other security service for political dissent. This worried civilians in other areas of Syria which witnessed siege and bombardment.

Second, the regime offered those who do not want to come to its areas or reconcile with the regime the option of “evacuation.” In reality this meant mass evictions to areas of northern Syria still under the control of the opposition: the northern and eastern countryside of Aleppo and the Idlib governorate.

The evacuation of civilians and combatants to northern Syria, would allow the regime to take back control and claim victory in major cities like Aleppo and Damascus and its suburbs.

The concentration of armed opposition factions in one geographical area then led them to exhaust themselves with infighting over resources and ideological differences. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) fought its way to hegemony over most of the Idlib governorate. As the battles against the regime stopped, funding for armed opposition factions dried up.

The role of HTS in the area is used to mislead international audiences into believing that terrorists are in control of Idlib, thus ensuring diplomatic silence over the regime’s massacres of civilians.

However, the recent offensive of northern Hama countryside must not only be read with the light of the regime’s aim of smothering the revolution and finishing it off. It is also a way to divert its own supporters’ attention back towards a military victory.

It comes after Assad’s supporters posted video clips and wrote on social media criticizing the government’s inability to meet the needs of the population living under its control such as cooking gas, transportation and heating fuel.

The Assad regime also wanted to get rid of some embarrassing allies - Iranian-backed militias - by exhausting them in battles against veteran opposition ground forces with little choice but to fight for their lives.

The regime may take military control over the last strongholds of the Opposition in northern Hama and Idlib. However, the massacres which it is committing will not be soon forgotten, and neither will the revolution that saw the people rise up and say no to Assad.

The reaction to the recent killing in Idlib, of Abdelbasset Sarout, a well-known revolutionary figure and former goalkeeper in the Syrian national football team, indicates that memories of the revolution are still alive.

Abdulsalam Dallal is a PhD student researching the political economy of NGOs in northern Syria.
Ghadeer reports on how women are challenging Saudi Arabia’s abusive male guardianship system on social media campaigns and supporting those who escape the country.

The male guardianship system is an unwritten Saudi law which allows men full control over women’s lives, despite the fact it has no legal basis. This system treats women as minors throughout their lives, although they are treated as adults within the criminal justice system and when facing the legal penalties of Islamic law.

This system makes women the victims of exploitation by men, their so-called legal guardians, who are able to marry girls as young as eight years old. Despite calls for the legal age for marriage to be raised to 18, the issue remains under discussion in Saudi Arabia and has not yet been resolved.

Women employees are also exploited by their male relatives as a result of this system. Their legal guardians may take part or all of a woman’s salary: “women don’t need money” is what they say. Sometimes they will forbid women from getting married, so that men outside the family do not benefit. Around the world work represents financial independence and freedom for women. For Saudi women reality is completely different because of the guardianship system which deprives them of their most basic human rights.

The struggle of Saudi women against the male guardianship system to claim their rights, and in particular their right to drive cars, began at the start of the 1990s. The demands of women activists were rejected and they were imprisoned but then released in the era of the late King Fahd.

There is a widespread belief that the cause of Saudi women’s problems was the religious nature of Saudi society and its customs. Women themselves have blamed the Saudi religious community and the so-called Islamic Awakening and the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, which targeted women, imprisoning them in their homes so as to prevent them from “committing abominations” and “destroying society.”

But those who watch the Saudi situation closely understand that the Saudi regime is based on an absolute monarchy which completely prevents people from political participation.

There are many true stories which we will cover here, but without using real names.
Hind works as a nurse in a hospital in one of the regions of Saudi Arabia. Her husband beats her in order to take away her bank card. Some might ask, “why not complain to the police and get him imprisoned? Why do you put up with it?”, and other questions.

The problem is that she cannot make a complaint because she has nowhere to go if she leaves her husband as her relationship with her father is tense and he will not take her in, if her husband complains to the police.

She will have no home for her children, as she does not live in her own house, but with her husband’s family. If she tried to live independently on her own, she could be jailed, and her children would be taken away from her. If she was taken in the state’s care she would be forced to live in a “Girls Welfare Home” which might as well be jail for every woman or child who cannot escape from them.

**Dreams of studying**

The problem of male guardianship extends to education, as women are prevented from completing their studies, so that the right to an education becomes a privilege which men can give or take away. Women may be subjected to blackmail, deprivation, or threat of deprivation by their male relatives.

Zahra, who dreams of studying medicine, has arranged her studies outside Saudi Arabia, but she must have a mahram or male guardian in order to be a student. She has a brother who studies in the United States but he refuses to help her without giving any convincing reasons so she ends up remaining in Saudi Arabia to study one of the medical specialisms there.

“Some medical procedures require the signature of a guardian,” Rahma says. “She is a cancer patient, who wanted to hide her condition from her family, even her male relatives, until the hospital asked her to bring a male guardian with her in order to undergo surgery. Her guardian can access her health records without her consent, if Iman is experiencing problems with her husband. The matter reached the stage of a court battle for custody of the children. Iman visited a psychiatrist in the past, and her husband took advantage of this, exploiting the psychological problems she was suffering in order to win custody of the children.

In 2016 Saudi women launched a campaign against the guardianship system on Twitter, sharing stories about their experiences and the impact of the system on their lives. Girls and women spoke out who had been harassed, abused and raped by their male relatives, and ended up detained in Girls Welfare Homes as a result, unable to leave without their guardian’s permission or without getting married, while their abusers and rapists remained free.

**Cosmetic improvements**

If we look at the so-called “New Saudi Arabia” promoted by Crown Prince Mohamed Bin Salman and his 2030 Vision document which talks about the empowerment of women, there have been some improvements such as allowing women to drive on 20 June 2018, after decades of demanding this right. Women are now allowed to attend football matches, to go to the cinema, parties and events. However, they are still deprived of social and political rights because laws which grant men jurisdiction over women.

In addition, the achievements of women’s rights activists who fought for reforms were stolen and they were accused of treason. The reforms were credited to the men and women of the Saudi royal family, who enjoy privileges that Saudi women do not.

Only women of the royal family are portrayed as symbols of the imaginary “vision” of the Crown Prince. For example, the image of Princess Haifa bin Abduallah bin Abdulaziz adorns the cover of an international magazine while sitting in her car, while women’s rights activists who fought for reforms were imprisoned.

The appointment of Princess Rima Bint Bandar bin Sultan Al Saud as the Saudi ambassador to the USA is also about improving Bin Salman’s image. Meanwhile the guardianship system is still operating, even on the princess herself.

If a woman returns to the country, her father can confiscate her passport or prevent her from travelling by withdrawing her travel permit.

A travel permit is required by men until the age of 21, and for women for life. She cannot travel without it, and
thanks to Absher app which sends a message telling him that his daughter is at the airport, a guardian can revoke permission with a few clicks. Thanks to Google and Apple, who host the app on the Play Store and the App Store, fathers can monitor women, preventing them from working and studying like any Saudi woman who wants genuine empowerment.

The same restrictions apply to the participation of women in local council elections, a decision made by King Abdullah Al Saud and adopted by King Salman, again under the slogan of empowering women and new reforms. But the male guardianship laws blocked women from becoming candidates, as they could not obtain the documents needed to stand, such as property deeds.

In addition, there were a number of feminist activists who were excluded, such as Nasima al-Sada, activist Samar al-Badawi, and activist Loujain al-Hathoul. Even those who succeeded in being elected were not allowed to mix with men and could participate in meetings only via a video link or behind a curtain separating the sexes, prompting some to resign.

Activist Maryam al-Otaibi tried to rent a house for herself to live in after she suffered domestic violence and filed a complaint with the police against one of her brothers, but her father filed a case against her, which resulted in her being imprisoned several times.

Many women exposed to violence and the ineffectiveness of laws have taken to Twitter to expose the effect of beatings and injuries. Not all of them were rescued, like Khadijah al-Dhafiri who was killed after she tweeted about the violence she had experienced. There are many women in Saudi Arabia like her, who are imprisoned as a result of laws supposed to “protect” them, while their abusers walk free.

Saudi women flee abroad

Although there are no precise figures for the number of women migrants, escapees and asylum seekers to Western countries, the escape of women proves the failure of the state to address women’s problems. The flight of girls and women from Saudi Arabia is a disaster for Bin Salman and his “New Saudi Arabia” which he wants to market globally. Yet instead of looking for real solutions rather than cosmetic ones, the “New Saudi Arabia” has been hunting down the fugitives, through the cooperation of the state with the parents through the Absher programme which provides government services to the Saudi Ministry of the Interior but which in turn can monitor and locate girls and women fleeing the country.

They will try to return fleeing women before they can claim asylum, and on their return they are charged with treason and defaming the Kingdom. Rather than freeing women from the guardianship system and modernising the laws and regulations which deny their rights, instead the emphasis is on not embarrassing Western governments by exposing the Saudi human rights record. Meanwhile, within Saudi Arabia we see the development of technology to repress and control movement. Modern Saudi Arabia is completely free of the spirit of modernity.

The real empowerment of women can only be achieved by overthrowing the male guardianship system

Women escape for many reasons, but all are within the scope of the male guardianship system and its effect on their lives. In some cases it is because they are deprived of the right to move freely and travel or the right to an education, in others because they have been forced to marry against their will, or because they want to divorce. For me personally, and many others, it is working for human rights and demanding rights and political freedoms which has led us to escape.

Dina Ali, a 24 year old woman, attempted to flee to Australia after her uncle - who became her guardian on her parents’ death - tried to marry her against her will. During a transit stop in the Philippines, she was detained by the Philippine government at the request of the Saudi embassy.

Despite having signed an agreement not to extradite refugees, the Philippine government handed Dina over to her uncle. Human Rights Watch has documented her case, through eyewitness accounts from those who were on the plane which took her back to Saudi Arabia. The last report from those close to her was that she was transferred to a “Girls Welfare Home.”

Maha and Wafaa al-Subaie, two sisters aged 28 and 25, recently also announced their escape. After five years of planning, they fled from Saudi Arabia after being beaten with electric cables and clothes hangers by family members. There are fears that they will be forced to return, especially given Saudi pressure on the Georgian government. The two sisters highlighted the Absher programme and called out Apple and Google’s complicity in restricting the movements of women in Saudi Arabia.

The two women’s search for a new homeland to protect them took a step forward when they received passports from Georgia recently, and in May they moved to a third country in order to escape their family and start a new life.

The kingdom’s methods in dealing with women, whether they have fled or are still in the country, come at a great price to the state’s reputation, as well as being costly in financial terms.

Cost of oppression

The male guardianship system has made the unemployment rate among women very high, since a woman’s employment is up to her guardian. Women are imprisoned in the Girls Welfare Homes at great expense if they do not want to return to their parents, because the state refuses to let them live independently.

The same applies to women prisoners who have ended their jail terms, but their parents have refused to accept them for tribal and social reasons, branding them as “shameful.” Yet a single royal decree could end the guardianship system. Why does not the state wish to give women the keys to freedom? How long will Saudi Arabia imprison women?

Serious reforms will only be achieved through the real empowerment of women, which can only be achieved by overthrowing the male guardianship system. This will only happen if the Kingdom really wants to change and develop by becoming a modern state with fundamental rights and freedoms.

Ghadeer is a women’s rights researcher for the European Saudi Organisation for Human Rights.
For nearly two months, thousands of protesters had been camped in the street outside the Sudanese army General Command in Khartoum, calling on ousted dictator Omar el Bashir’s old generals to hand over power to a civilian government.

On 3 June, the generals struck back, sending the Rapid Support Forces militia to kill, rape, injure and terrify protesters in a bid to crush the mass movement which has grown up to challenge their power. According to sources in the Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors (CCSD) at least 113 people were killed between 3 June and 7 June.

The RSF troops pursued their injured victims into hospital, beating up and threatening the medical staff who tried to treat them. At least five major hospitals were shut down by militia.
action in the aftermath of the attack, according to CCSD.

The trail of death and destruction left by the RSF, which is commanded by Mohamed Dagalo, better known as ‘Hemedti’, is no aberration. The RSF was formed out of the Janjaweed, the brutal paramilitary forces which terrorised Darfur on the orders of El Bashir’s government in Khartoum a decade and a half ago.

Despite the short memories of Western diplomats and some of the international media who seem to have fallen for the RSF commander’s reinvention as a statesman following his elevation to the vice-presidency of the Transitional Military Council which took power on El Bashir’s ouster, Hemedti is nothing more than a jumped-up bandit, a small-scale warlord turned counter-revolutionary henchman who has ambitions to ply his murderous trade from the helm of the state.

Hemedti’s admirers are not only to be found among the military leaders at the core of El Bashir’s regime. He has won the backing of regional powers who are betting on counter-revolution to halt the march of a mass movement which might threaten their economic and political influence over Sudan.

Hemedti went to Saudi Arabia in on 23 May, where he promised to continue supplying Sudanese soldiers to fight as cannon-fodder in the Saudi-led war on Yemen. Saudi Crown Prince Mohamed Bin Salman pledged “vast investment” in Sudan in return.

While Hemedti made final preparations for the attack on the sit-in, Transitional Military Council president Abdel fattah al-Burhan toured Saudi Arabia, UAE and Egypt for advice and support.

If they hoped for a swift end to the protest movement which has rocked Sudan since December 2018, they were to be disappointed. Opposition groups led by the Sudanese Professionals Association and the Forces of the Declaration of Freedom and Change, called for a general strike in defiance of the RSF’s terror on 9, 10 and 11 June.

According reports from the SPA’s media team, the strike shut down many sectors of the economy, ranging from education to transport, including Khartoum international airport.
food industries, telecommunications, hospitals and over 60 percent of the banking sector. The three-day strike followed another general strike on 28 and 29 May, immediately before the assault on the sit-in which also mobilised massive support across Sudan.

The strikes have only been one part of the opposition alliance’s strategy, however, and followed weeks of direct negotiations over the exact composition of a future transitional government.

Talks broke down over the question of whether generals should outnumber civilians in the “sovereignty council” at the top of the state. On this point, Al-Burhan and Hemedti refused to give way, and bolstered by support from their regional allies unleashed the RSF against protesters, declaring the talks were over.

The June general strike seemed to change their mind: Al-Burhan first said that if the protests ended, negotiations could begin again. Then he dropped conditions on talks altogether a few days later. Meanwhile, the African Union and neighbouring Ethiopia made their own proposals and counter-proposals to the TMC and opposition forces about ways to break the deadlock.

The Ethiopian proposal, which acceded to media reports was accepted by the opposition negotiating team, would see civilian and military figures equally balanced in the sovereignty council, with a “neutral” chair.

Yet, while the repressive heart of El Bashir’s state remains intact, it is hard to see how negotiations can achieve anything except buy time for the generals to plan a more effective crackdown in future. Civilians and generals do not have equal weight in the state apparatus, and “balancing” between them in reality means perpetuating military rule behind a civilian cover. One of the military council’s vulnerabilities is the wavering loyalty of the lower ranks in the regular army, and the resentment of its junior officers towards the RSF and its leadership.

At the height of the mass mobilisations, such as the 6 April protests which established the Khartoum sit-in, there were signs that the army was beginning to crack. Further general strikes will have to do the same again, if the revolution is to reach the next phase in the struggle.

‘BULLETS CANNOT KILL THE DESIRE TO BE FREE’

The brutal attack on the sit-in at the army headquarters will not crush the desire for revolutionary change says Zeinab Ahmed

I left my mum, baby brother and sister only hours before the massacre. I wasn’t worried. It was safe then. It was the first time in decades that Sudan truly felt like it was in the hands of the people. The joy of victory, however, was short lived.

In transit through Egypt, my Dad called me and told me that the mass sit-in had been dispersed. He didn’t have to say much more. Immediately, I knew what that entailed. I thought of my family who I had left only hours ago. I thought of my friends who spent a lot of time at the sit-in and the thousands of others who considered it home. With their internet cut, and our means of communication severed, I sobbed all through my second flight, worrying if they were alive or not.

The massacre on 3 June didn’t merely disperse a sit-in: it killed a community. More than a site of protest, it was a glimpse into the Sudan that, for 30 years, the people had been denied. Within only weeks, the teamwork of determined citizens had created a place where democracy was paramount, no citizen slept unsheltered, food was accessible to all, healthcare was a right and free education was provided for children who otherwise would have never had the opportunity.

But how did this sit-in come about and why was it dispersed?

Peaceful protests had been taking place in Sudan since December 2018. However, 6 April was different. For weeks prior, heavy advertising had called millions of people nationwide to take the streets all at once - on a day we called the ‘millioniya’. Not a wall in the city was left without ’6 April’ spray-painted on it. Significant numbers were expected, but not even the government could have anticipated the magnitude of the event.

Since December, the NISS (National Intelligence and Security Service) had been dispersing protestors using live ammunition, tear gas, beatings and arbitrary arrests, but it became evident early on, that the millioniya was something they simply couldn’t tackle.

That day, millions of protestors headed to the military headquarters in the capital, to ask for the support and protection of the army; they agreed.

The disruption to the order of the city was our leverage as protestors. We refused to leave the sit-in until all our demands were met.

Low-ranking soldiers protected civilians against the NISS - many losing their lives in the process. For them, going against orders is a crime punishable by death, therefore it was our responsibility, as civilians, to stay put in order the protect the army that protected us. And so, the sit-in was established.

Words cannot describe how massive it was. Its sheer size and central location made it a huge disruption to everyday life. It blocked numerous main roads as well as access to one of the most important bridges in the country. The disruption to the order of the city was our leverage as protestors. We refused to leave the sit-in until all our demands were met.

Within 5 days of its establishment, president Omar El Bashir - dictator and war criminal of 30 years - was
ousted. That was on 11 April, perhaps the most joyful day in our history, until El Bashir’s successor was announced. He was Ibn Awf, Minister of Defence - a man possibly even crueler than El Bashir, whose hands are stained with the blood of the 300,000 people killed in the Darfur genocide.

The mood in the country rapidly shifted from ecstasy to fury and, in just one day, Ibn Awf was ousted too.

Despite their efforts, the government’s use of lethal force never scared the people, but rather deepened their anger and craving for democracy. Bullets cannot kill the desire to be free. This is the reality that the government still doesn’t understand. The Transitional Military Council thought that the key to securing their power was to disperse the mass sit-in and escape the negotiations that it was engaging in with the Alliance for Freedom and Change — a group that proudly represents all sectors of the civil population and their demands.

On 3 June, led by current vice president, Hemedti, the RSF (Rapid Support Forces) militia gunned down hundreds of peaceful protestors. The name RSF is the government’s attempt to legitimise the Janjaweed militias who terrorised Darfur for years. People call them the “devils on horseback.”

It was the day before Eid, the largest celebration in the Islamic calendar. On what was supposed to be one of the most joyful days of the year, the militia extended its violence beyond the sit-in, flooding the entire country with its soldiers.

Innocent people were thrown into the Nile alive alongside the corpses of those shot dead. Others were burned alive in their tents as they slept. Soldiers were seen standing on top of cars shooting into people’s homes and breaking into them to assault their residents. Not even places of worship were exempt from their cruelty. A six year old girl was allegedly raped by 10 soldiers in a mosque as detained worshipers begged them to stop.

I learned of all these events once I landed and had access to the internet - a privilege that many in Sudan currently don’t have. Every internet company in Sudan is down except for the one that my family used; a coincidence that I am endlessly thankful for. I wish I could say the same for my friends, many of which went missing and were later found in detention, others that I haven’t heard from since I left.

The suspense as my mother’s phone rang was the most intense feeling of dread and fear that I’d experienced for as long as I can remember. I wanted them to leave Sudan, but the airport was closed. What if they were stopped by the RSF? They made it to the airport safe, perhaps the biggest relief I’ve ever felt. They escaped safely and returned home. I’m so blessed to be able to say that, at a time when hundreds of families have lost their loved ones.

President Al-Burhan, Vice-President Hemedti and all the members of the Transitional Military Council are murderers and tyrants. They have cost mothers their children and children their mothers. The sit-in is gone, but the revolution is alive and well. We will avenge every martyr and every family that is mourning. We’ve come too far now and we’ll continue peacefully until victory.

Zeinab Ahmed is the pen-name of a Sudanese activist now living in the UK.
A mass movement on an extraordinary scale seems set on a collision course with the military core of Algeria’s authoritarian regime. Gianni Del Panta, Lemnaouar Hamamouche, Kamel Aissat and Selma Oumari discuss the roots and development of the popular uprising.

Months of massive demonstrations have forced president Abdelaziz Bouteflika out of power, while several of his cronies have landed in jail. Street protests and strikes have consistently rejected attempts to defuse popular anger through new presidential elections, and the arrest and imprisonment of some allies of the ousted president.

Meanwhile, army chief Ahmed Gaid Salah has sent riot police into the streets to beat and tear gas protesters. He has also turned to tactics of divide-and-rule, attacking protesters for carrying the Amazigh (Berber) banner alongside the Algerian national flag, harking back to a long history of state-sponsored repression of Amazigh language and culture.

Gianni Del Panta

The current turmoil represents the most powerful mass-based protest movement Algeria has seen since the 1988 popular uprising. Since the end of the cruel and long-lasting civil war fought by the military against Islamist groups in the 1990s, Western commentators and liberal pundits have presented an image of Algeria as a stable state, committed to eradicating terrorism.

Such an interpretation was strengthened by the ability of the Algerian autocracy, in contrast to what happened to other North African regimes, to weather the 2010-11 storm. For many, the combination of the legacy of the atrocities of the civil war and extensive social spending made feasible by hydrocarbon resources was enough to immunise Algeria from the spirit of the Arab uprisings.

Unsurprisingly, the outbreak of protests has stunned journalists and scholars. In their frenzy to find palatable explanations for something that they had never expected to witness, the framework used by commentators has been drawn from pro-market and liberal interpretations of the 2010-11 Arab uprisings.

According to this perspective, what is happening today is an example of a clash between the people and a corrupted, mafia-style, and patronage-based regime.

The quintessential element of such a picture is president Bouteflika. In a country where almost 70 percent of the population is aged below 30, an ageing and ill man, forced to use a wheelchair after a stroke in 2013 and almost completely invisible to the public for the last 6 years, was requesting a new mandate in elections.

However, the storm that is hitting Algeria now has been long in the making. The cycle of protests has speeded up markedly since 2013.

This has mainly been the outcome of action by three groups. Firstly, public sector workers employed in the education and health sectors, organised through independent trade unions.
Secondly, the lower classes of the south of the country, the area in which gas and oil resources are most concentrated, but who are constantly marginalised in economic, social and political terms by the elites of the coast.

Thirdly and finally, blue-collar workers in the heavily industrialised area of Rouiba, not far away from the capital Algiers.

Mobilisations by these groups have created a culture of protest, producing several important breaks in the regime’s authoritarian domination. This, in turn, opened up space for today’s protest movement, as the political opposition has capitalised on the momentum created by social protests.

**Lemnaouar Hamamouche**

The popular movement’s roots lie in the rejection of Bouteflika’s fifth term as president, after he proposed standing again in the presidential elections.

However, once the movement spread across the country, it raised other demands. People began to call for the regime itself to fall, using the slogans "Système dégage" and "yetnahaw ga3", meaning all of those responsible for the system must go.

Since 22 February the people in the streets have included workers, students, the unemployed, shopkeepers and large sections of the general population who have occupied the streets in almost all of Algeria’s 48 provinces every Friday.

This is an extraordinarily large movement, which brings in workers who are protesting and demanding the resignation of the trade union bureaucracy.

In Algeria we have the UGTA, the General Union of Algerian Workers, which counts millions of workers as members. It represents the trade union movement at a national level and is led essentially by bureaucrats who not only have their own privileged interests, but they also work for the interests of the bosses.

The UGTA is part of a tripartite structure which brings in the union federation as representative of the workers, alongside the government and the bosses organisation the FCE (Forum des Chefs d’Entreprises).

Over the years, the UGTA bureaucracy has always voted for reforms which are not in the interests of the workers, such as the harsh labour code. This explains why, during the current pre-revolutionary moment, there are workers raising demands against the bureaucracy and who are organising themselves to take back control of the UGTA.

There are 5 regional union federations which have repeatedly called for strikes to demand an end to the regime. It is these who really represent the workers, not Sidi Said and his clique at the head of the UGTA.

**People began to call for the regime itself to fall. All of those responsible for the system must go.**

That is to say, it was not a passive strike, but it was not followed by other organisations, for example unions in factories or by the universities. This example shows how the movement has not yet created its own forms of organisation.

We can see attempts within the movement to build independent organisations - there are the women’s collectives, the autonomous committees created during the rise of the movement, and the popular committees - but these are still embryonic.

**Kamel Aissat**

The movement which has erupted in Algeria is actually on a larger scale, from the point of view of popular participation, than the movements in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011.

Algeria is a country of 2.3 million square km, with 42 million inhabitants, and the Friday demonstrations bring together more than 10 million people across the whole country, from the far south to the north and from the east to the west. We see a huge mixture of people on the marches. Women play an important role in the demonstrations, and there are women’s collectives which have sprung up in some areas to make demands for equality in the movement.

The movement is also characterised by its popular nature. It is a movement of the majority - of the poor, the unemployed and the excluded.

Workers are acting more as working-class citizens rather than as the working class in an organised sense, because the Bouteflika regime co-opted all forms of organisation.

There was a significant democratic retreat over the past twenty years, which particularly affected social organisations in Algeria, and which corrupted an important section of the trade union movement.

This is why the trade unions are cautious in their approach and tend to call for support for the popular movement, rather than seeing themselves as actors in the movement.

We could say the same thing about the UGTA which at the top level was essentially taken over by the regime, and became an ‘in-house union’, even if there are some sections of resistance today which want to get rid of the trade union bureaucracy.

The issue here is not the trade union leaders as such, but we need to see the workers themselves taking over their union from the bottom up, with a programme of democratic and social demands, based on a fight for raising wages and purchasing power and in defence of national policies.

**Selma Oumari**

The movement is mostly organised around the Friday demonstrations, the student protests every Tuesday, and local strikes.

The political landscape has always been shaped by strikes from different sectors, but the one that plays a key role is the oil and gas sector as it paralyses most of the economy.

The movement’s dynamic has helped rank and file trade unionists to challenge the UGTA bureaucracy, which has been collaborating with Bouteflika’s regime. I believe it is important not only to support the independent trade
unions, but to win independence for the UGTA.

However, there is a need for more local structures. The movement is not organised enough to take over the street on a daily basis.

Women are marginalised in public spaces, and only 18 percent are able to get a job. They are second class citizens as they don’t have the same rights as men. That is why they are very concerned and active in the process of social change.

They are visible in the movement and are shaping the political debate around their own issues. Feminist blocs are very lively on the Friday demonstrations, raising debates within the movement about women’s rights.

Women are visible in the movement and are shaping the political debate around their own issues. They are pushing for the abolition of the Family Code, which enshrines women’s legal status as inferior to men. As organisers, they are active in the student movement, and in the trade unions.

Women played a major role in Algerian revolutionary history, for example in the war of liberation against French colonialism. Djamila Bouhired, a national icon from that period, is participating in the movement against the current system.

Amazigh identity, which used to be vilified and excluded, is now embraced by all Algerians. It has always challenged the ideology of the state, which denies the ancient history of the Amazigh people in the name of Arab nationalism, a vision associated with authoritarianism and dictatorship.

Both the Algerian and Amazigh flags are legitimate and are used widely on the demonstrations. It is interesting to see how the Amazigh flag triggers rage among Algeria’s rulers, with army chief Gaïd Salah trying to forbid its use on the protests.

There are some attempts to open a dialogue with the regime. For example, various associations, independent trade unions and human rights groups have declared a “civil society road map” for a transition period.

These groups don’t want to represent the popular movement, nor do they wish to organise it, but they do want to benefit from the movement in order to open a dialogue with the regime from above. The civil society groups are looking for a consensual figure to lead the transition. Their proposals include demands such as the liberation of political prisoners, but they don’t mention women’s rights.

Until now, the regime has been able to contain political opposition by meeting their demands while maintaining the overall system intact. That is why people don’t want political representatives who make agreements from above. They want a clear break with the regime.

The civil society roadmap is caught, therefore, because the radicalisation of the popular movement and the tightening grip of Gaïd Salah’s military regime.

The only way to break out of this is for the movement to develop its own legitimacy, which has to emerge from below - from the occupied streets, schools and factories. That is what is missing today and is the only way to force the military to leave power, as the Sudanese example is showing us.

Gianni Del Panta is a researcher based in Italy. Lemnaouar Hamamouche is an Algerian student activist and, along with Kamel Aissat, is a leading member of the Algerian socialist party, the PST. Selma Oumari is an Algerian activist living in France and a member of the New Anticapitalist Party. Interviews translated and transcribed by Anne Alexander and Sheila Amrouche.
The struggle for democracy in Sudan has been met with protests across the UK and around the world, with thousands of Sudanese activists and their allies taking to the streets.

On 6 April, the same day that hundreds of thousands of demonstrators converged on the Ministry of Defence in Khartoum to demand the overthrow of President El Bashir, thousands of protestors also gathered in London to march from the Sudanese embassy to Downing Street.

While El Bashir fell just days later, the seizure of power by the military and the bloody regime violence against the sit-ins in Khartoum brought campaigners in the UK out onto the streets again.

Labour Shadow Chancellor joined the wave of anger, stating that, “the bloody attempt to suppress the peaceful demonstrations calling for democracy in the Sudan must be condemned and international pressure applied to secure the end of violence.”

A rally organised in Whitehall by Sudanese organisations and Middle East Solidarity saw hundreds rage against the slaughter of demonstrators in Khartoum by the regime.

Demonstrators criticised the British government’s continuing diplomatic relations with the Sudanese government and the money that European states have funnelled to the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, which acts as a cutting edge for the counterrevolution.

And hundreds of protestors toured the diplomatic quarter of London in mid-June, demonstrating at the embassies of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The repressive regimes in all three states have provided vital support to the Sudanese military.

But the demonstrations haven’t been limited to central London. There have been significant mobilisations in support of the revolution in Liverpool, Leeds, Bristol and other cities across Britain.

This reflects international outrage at the massacre in Khartoum and support for the uprising. Demonstrations have taken place in Germany, Holland, France, Ireland and Greece, as well as in the US, Canada and Australia.

Meanwhile, solidarity has gone viral with the #BlueForSudan social media campaign, which calls for users to turn their profile pictures blue in support of the Sudanese Revolution.
London protests for Algeria defy flag ban and call for unity
Sheila Amrouche

As the mass movement has unfolded on the streets of Algeria, activists in London have mobilised regular protests on Saturdays and Sundays to show their solidarity with marches and rallies outside the embassy.

On 22 June, hundreds of activists carrying Algerian and Amazigh flags joined the march. Protesters told us they were angry at army chief Gaid Salah’s attempt to ban the Amazigh flag from demonstrations in Algeria.

“They have been chasing people through the streets for holding a Berber flag,” Kamal Amazigh said.

“What next? Is Gaid Salah going to try and abolish my language? ... The generals are looking to sit on the throne and govern the country for us. They all ought to be jailed.”

Rabie is one of the volunteers at the protests. “No-one should be giving orders to Algerian protesters about which flag we should raise. The national flag is our first flag and a lot of martyrs died for it. The Berber flag does not only represent the Algerian Berbers but all the Berbers of North Africa, which is the real identity of Algeria, something that all the Algerians are proud of.”

“All we’ve had from Gaid Salah is empty speeches. We don’t want a military regime. We don’t want to keep the same regime which has been in power since ’62. We don’t want any remnants of Bouteflika or the old regime. We want a new Algerian state, a state of rights and justice.”

Abdellah Behlouli said that protesters would not give in to the army’s divide-and-rule tactics. “Gaid Salah and the regime are playing this trick in an attempt to divide people. But the answer was very strong from Algerian citizens, they have become more united than before.”

Go to www.dzprotest.org.uk for details of the London demonstrations

Trade unionists back campaign for Louisa Hanoune
MENA Solidarity

Activists from UCU, PCS and NEU joined a delegation to the Algerian embassy on 20 June in solidarity with Louisa Hanoune, General Secretary of the radical left Workers’ Party who was detained by a military court in Algeria on 9 May.

Louisa is one of increasing numbers of activists to face detention and jail in recent weeks, as the Algerian regime has attempted to use repression against organisers and supporters of the mass popular protests and strikes.

In a statement the organisers of the Free Louisa Hanoune campaign said: “Louisa Hanoune has been known in the world and for years for her stance and her uncompromising fight in defence of democracy, freedoms, women’s rights. She is always on the side of the people and the oppressed”

Louisa is well-known for her campaigns against the Family Code, which discriminates against Algerian women, treating them essentially as minors, and for equal recognition of the Berber language alongside Arabic.

In the leadership of the Workers Party, she has been active for many years supporting striking workers and fighting for social justice.

A statement in solidarity with Louisa has been launched by the international campaign and is gathering endorsements from leading activists in UCU, the bakers’ union BFAWU, NEU, Unite and PCS.

Christina Paine from the UCU National Executive gave a copy of the statement to staff at the embassy on behalf of the delegation. Further signatures will be handed in at a follow up meeting trade unionists are requesting with the ambassador.

Search “Free Louisa Hanoune” on Facebook for updates from the campaign.
Ahed Tamimi joins rally for Palestinian rights in London
Richard Donnelly

Thousands of demonstrators flocked to Central London on Saturday 11th May to demand the right of return for Palestinian refugees and hear from teenage West Bank activist Ahed Tamimi.

Praising the international solidarity movement against Israeli apartheid, she told the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) demonstration, “it was your voice which kept me strong when I was in prison.”

Tamimi was detained for eight months for slapping an Israeli soldier after her 15-year old cousin was shot in the head with a rubber bullet at close range.

The demonstration also heard from Diane Abbott, Richard Burgon and other Labour Party MPs, as well as representatives from major trade unions. It came just days ahead of the Eurovision Song Contest being hosted in Tel Aviv, which provoked calls for a boycott from pro-Palestinian groups across Europe.

The PSC rally was significantly larger than other recent mobilisations against Israeli aggression in Gaza and the West Bank, with many activists hoping that this signals a new determination to defy attempts to suppress pro-Palestinian activism in Britain.

Supporters of the Israeli state have managed to secure backing from an increasing number of local councils and other political institutions for the IHRA definition of antisemitism, which restricts the right to criticise Israel by conflating opposition to Zionism with racism against Jewish people.

Go to www.palestinecampaign.org

UCU Congress rallies in solidarity with Sudan uprising
Anne Alexander

Delegates at annual congress of the University and Colleges Union (UCU) voted for a motion brought by the union’s Liverpool branch committing to a programme of solidarity with the struggle in Sudan for democratic change. Hundreds gathered in the Congress hall for a photo-call expressing solidarity with the general strike on 28 and 29 May.

Other unions have also backed the popular uprising in Sudan. Bakers’ and food workers’ union BFAWU also passed a similar motion at its annual congress and a solidarity motion on Sudan was set to be adopted by Unison’s National Executive following Unison conference in June.

Delegates at UCU’s national congress | Photo: Jane Atkins
Middle East Solidarity has teamed up with three amazing Sudanese artists who are using their work to raise funds for injured protesters. Read more about the artists here and find out how you can help us with this special appeal by buying posters and making a donation online.

**Khalid AlBaih**

Khalid is a Sudanese artist and political cartoonist that was born in Bucharest, Romania in 1980. He currently lives and works in Doha, Qatar, where he has been based since 1990. His work features in publications such as The Guardian and Al Jazeera. Find more of Khalid’s work in this issue of Middle East Solidarity on the inside front page and on page 14.

Instagram: @khalidalbaih

**Alaa Satir**

Alaa is a Sudanese artist from Khartoum. She graduated as an architect and currently working as a graphic designer, illustrator and cartoonist. Since the uprising began in December 2018 she has also created several murals of her artworks. Her work usually addresses social issues and very often advocates for women’s rights.

Instagram: @alaasatir
How to donate and buy posters

Poster prints of selected artworks are available to buy from Bookmarks bookshop (https://bookmarksbookshop.co.uk).

Find out more about the artists and their work on our website. Go to www.menasolidaritynetwork/sudanartappeal.

All proceeds from the appeal will go to the Sudan Doctors’ Union-UK fund for aid to injured protesters.

Make an online donation at https://www.gofundme.com/emergency-medical-aid-for-sudan

Yasmin ElNour

Yasmin is a Sudanese visual artist mainly using digital collage, but she is an architect by profession. She uses historical Sudanese monuments, local imagery, textures and hues that are all related to Sudan in her work. The poster on the left shows protesters in 1964, during a previous struggle against military rule, while on the right, Yasmin has portrayed “Lady Justice.”

Instagram: @kandaka.khronicles
Dozens at risk of execution in Saudi Arabia

Human rights organisations are warning that at least 20 Saudi citizens are at imminent risk of execution, including several who were convicted of “crimes” allegedly committed when they were children, as the regime uses the death penalty against peaceful opposition activists in an attempt to silence dissenting voices.

In April 2019, the Saudi regime beheaded 37 people in an act which the European Saudi Organisation for Human Rights (ESOHR) called “mass slaughter”. The young men, including six who were children at the time their alleged “crimes” took place, all faced unfair trials, abuse and torture in detention.

Many of the charges relate to popular protests in the Qatif region in 2011. As uprisings swept the Arab world, people took to the streets to call for democratic rights and social justice in Saudi Arabia’s eastern regions, where the population is largely Shi’a and faces systematic persecution by the state.

The regime is also threatening to execute prominent Sunni Islamist critics, including writer and activist Sheikh Salman al-Oudah, Dr. Ali al-Amri, Sheikh Awad al-Qarni, and researcher Hassan Farhan al-Maliki.

What you can do:
• Go to www.esohr.org for campaign information

Stand with Egyptian political prisoners

The killing by medical neglect of former president Mohamed Morsi has highlighted the dire conditions for tens of thousands of political prisoners in Egyptian jails.

Morsi collapsed and died in court on 17 June after years in jail, many of them spent in solitary confinement, without access to adequate medical care for his diabetes.

In the wake of his death, Egyptian activists warned that the regime was using collective punishment against the estimated 50,000 political prisoners who remain behind bars after unfair trials.

Family visits were banned and the prison authorities were reported to be denying prisoners access to routine medical care for diabetes, heart and blood pressure conditions, refusing to transfer prisoners to hospital and closing prison clinics. Prisoners rely on visits from family to bring them food and medication in order to survive in Egypt’s filthy, overcrowded jails.

Jails were on lockdown, activists reported on Facebook, as the authorities attempted to break prisoners’ resistance. Despite the repression, detainees in Torah Jail, one of the regime’s most notorious detention facilities, launched a hunger strike in protest at Morsi’s killing, demanding an end to medical neglect in prison. They also organised nightly protests shouting slogans and running against the cell doors.

Although alleged supporters of the opposition Muslim Brotherhood form the largest group of political detainees, repression extends across the political spectrum. Socialist activist Haitham Mohamedain was arrested again on 13 May, before being brought before prosecutors and remanded in custody for 15 days on charges of “aiding a terrorist group in achieving its goals”.

A fresh wave of arrests on 25 June also saw other activists and journalists targeted in a trumped-up case accusing them of being part of a conspiracy by the Muslim Brotherhood to “destroy the economy.”

Former Social Democratic Party MP Ziyad al-Alimi and journalist Hisham Fouad were among those seized in dawn raids.

What you can do:
• Go to www.egyptsolidarityinitiative.org for campaign resources and information.
• Write to the Egyptian embassy demanding the immediate release of all political prisoners
Disabled activists join a protest in Tunisia in 2011 | Photo: Nasser Nouri

Bahrain Watch
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.

MENA Solidarity
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.

Egypt Solidarity
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.
What lies behind US drive to war with Iran?

Anne Alexander explores the long-term logic behind the rising tension between the US and Iran.

Among the many election promises which US president Donald Trump seems set on breaking is his pledge to keep the US out of costly foreign wars. For over a year now, the US has lurched ever closer to the brink of war with Iran.

It withdrew from the JCPOA deal on Iran’s nuclear capability in May 2018, reinstated economic sanctions with Iran in November, and ordered a missile strike against Iranian targets in June 2019, which was aborted by Trump at the last minute.

Meanwhile, Iranian and US spokesmen traded verbal blows over who was responsible for attacks on tankers using the Straits of Hormuz in the Gulf.

While some in the mainstream media have concentrated on Trump’s “erratic” behaviour - “the Iran policy has the strategic coherence of a Jackson Pollock painting,” the FT quoted Iran expert Karim Sajadpour as saying - there are both long and short-term factors pushing the US towards war.

They relate to the changing balance of economic and military power in the wider Middle East, and the effects of two disastrous miscalculations which ultimately weakened the superpower’s dominance.

The first of these was the assumption made by US officials in the 1970s that their interests were best served by relying on Iran, then under the rule of the Shah, and Saudi Arabia, to maintain “stability” in the Middle East.

The Shah’s corrupt, authoritarian regime was seen by the US as good long-term investment: he was showered with arms and aid despite presiding over intense repression and rising social inequality. The popular revolution which overthrew the Shah in 1979 and the subsequent rise of the Islamic Republic exposed the hollowness of this policy.

The outcome of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was very different to the “American Century” imagined by US neocon hawks. Instead of ushering in the emergence of a US-friendly, economically liberal Iraqi state, it created a military quagmire as US forces were bogged down in brutal counter-insurgency operations.

Worse than that, the major beneficiary of the military catastrophe in Iraq was neighbouring Iran, which saw its regional military and economic influence grow dramatically during the 2000s.

Partnership with the same Iraqi Shi’a Islamist forces the US had promoted to power in the wake of the invasion, allowed the Iranian regime to escape some of the consequences of US sanctions and partially break out of its encirclement by the US.

Meanwhile, the rise of Saudi Arabia as a regional power has also supercharged US-Iranian tensions.

The growing importance of Saudi and Gulf capital in the wider Middle East has fed into an increasingly aggressive foreign policy role for the kingdom. Saudi Arabia led the regional counter-revolutions which halted the uprisings of 2011, and in 2015 launched a brutal war on Yemen, where its forces are currently fighting groups it claims are allied with Iran.

The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran at a regional level is another factor pushing the US towards the brink. The setbacks that the US has suffered have increased the Saudi rulers’ room for manoeuvre and their ability to pursue their own agenda of economic and military competition with Iran. This is being played out across the Gulf and even into Iraq, where Saudi economic and political influence has been growing in recent years.

Israel of course plays a key role in this process as well. The Zionist state has benefitted massively from its military and economic alliance with the US over the years, maintaining its long-term role as a guardian of American interests in the region.

The relative weakening of US military power has created opportunities for Israeli right wing politicians to lobby for war with Iran, hoping to bolster their electoral support at home and score points in the battle for influence over Syria, where they see the alliance between Iran and the Assad regime as a serious threat.