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The sweet smell of counter-revolution

By Pepe Escobar

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United States Secretary of Defense Robert Gates is in Riyadh to talk to Saudi King Abdullah. The Associated Press told the world's media they should discuss the "Arab upheaval". Then there are all those other cliches - "political reform", oil production, "the Iran threat". But as the Pentagon meets the House of Saud at the current juncture, they can only say one thing: I love the smell of counter-revolution in the morning.

Yes, it smells greater than napalm. And it does smell like victory. The US-Saudi counter-revolution is winning, hands down, against the great 2011 Arab revolt. The House of Saud wanted Hosni Mubarak in Egypt to hang on to power all the way - and so did Washington, who first said the regime was "stable", then bet on Omar "Sheikh al-Torture" Suleiman carrying an "orderly transition", and then, when the collapse was inevitable, reluctantly joined the Tahrir Square crowds.

To prevent Washington from even trying to embark again on the right side of history, the House of Saud had its plan in place to smash the peaceful protests in Bahrain, by invading its neighbor across the King Fahd causeway. This was only possible because a crucial exchange with Washington was already clinched; we get you an Arab League vote for a no-fly zone over Libya, you let us deal with Bahrain (see Exposed: the US-Saudi Libya deal Asia Times Online, April 2, 2011).

As Gates and Abdullah discuss the intricacies of "US outreach" (those dictators that can get away with murder) and "regime alteration" (those they want thrown to the dogs), the current juncture

spells out Washington/House of Saud in charge on all fronts - wrong side of history and all.

The House of Saud and Qatar are now (subtly) dictating the "transition" in Libya. This Qatari-Saudi alliance now mirrors the Israeli-Saudi alliance. The House of Saud is also dictating the transition in Yemen - now that the Barack Obama administration has decided to throw President Ali Abdullah Saleh to the dogs (because he was incompetent enough to not kill enough of his people and thus smash their peaceful revolution). Saleh is now worthless as "our bastard" in the American war against al-Qaeda in the Arabic Peninsula (AQAP) even as the Yemeni opposition - which does not trust the Saudis - is being co-opted by corrupt, al-Qaeda-friendly General Ali Mohsen. The US Central Intelligence Agency is merrily accepting bids for Saleh's successor.

Qatar, now more hawkish than the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), is being duly rewarded. A Qatari diplomat should succeed opportunist Amr Moussa as secretary general of the Arab League (Moussa wants an upgrade, as the next Egyptian president). What next? A Qatari secretary general for NATO? Well, they had enough money to buy the 2022 soccer World Cup.

Gates and Abdullah may also talk about the spectacular success of the Pentagon's Africom, which only started proceedings in late 2008 but already has been involved in its first major African war. Who cares that Africom commander, General Carter Ham, now has to explain this war to scores of African Union (AU) member-states, who never wanted his command in their lands in the first place? Even Gates had admitted that the war on Libya was not exactly a US strategic priority.

A House of Saud cabinet meeting, according to Saudi paper Arab News, "expressed appreciation" for a statement by the pathetic al-Khalifa dynasty in Bahrain thanking the Saudis for invading their country; "peace and stability returned to Bahrain as a result of the wisdom of its leadership in dealing with its internal matters". Then everybody yelled and blamed Iran.

Time to be inclusive

The al-Khalifas in Bahrain are definitely succeeding in toppling their own people. If only they could throw 70% of the population into the Persian Gulf and thus rule in peace. They closed the country's only opposition newspaper - al-Wasat - and then reopened it with a pro-Khalifa new editor.

Human rights activists, journalists and bloggers have vanished - or were made to vanish. Businessmen and chief executive officers are being threatened for not firing workers who went on strike. Virtually no one is tweeting or facebooking anymore. Shi'ite families who live in mixed neighborhoods are moving out because they are being threatened every time they are stopped in checkpoints. People are talking in code on the phone. As far as the Obama administration is concerned, Bahrain does not even exist.

Bahrain's descent into the 7th century is Dubai's gain. Dubai will grow up to 4% this year - benefiting from the "turmoil" in the Arab world. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) population will reach 8.26 million; foreign workers are streaming in, many of them from Bahrain.

Qatar and UAE are part of the small, unrepresentative "coalition of the willing" involved in the NATO no-fly zone scam in Libya. Now the British are "urging" these two Arab paragons of democracy to train that motley crew - the eastern Libya "rebels", so they can annex and hold to a few grains of desert sand before some kind of ceasefire is negotiated.

Translation: good business for British "private security companies", as in mercenaries, some of whom have special services experience. Their salaries soon should be paid by Qatar, UAE and Jordan, that land infested with "security officers" and ruled by King Playstation. This proves once more there's only one, non-United Nations resolution 1973-authorized game in town; regime change.

No one can predict what the ramifications of the great 2011 Arab revolt will be in terms of oil production, immigration flows, the relationship with Israel, the attraction of Turkey as a political model, and the future of the al-Qaeda franchise. But as it stands Washington's national security policy still looks and feels like an Orientalist opium dream; we can only deal with the Arab world via a local comprador tyrant/dictator. Quick, more of that opium; we're just so hooked on it.

So why not just annex the whole thing? America could do well with an oil-rich 51st state. Talk about a stimulus package. US citizens could even collect the oil as their taxes. Time to cut the middlemen. Who in the Arab world wouldn't love to answer to Obama rather than those pathetic Abdullahs and al-Khalifas?