

KUWAIT: A FORESEEABLE DISASTER AND SOME POLITICALLY INCORRECT REFLECTIONS

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The lesson that Kuwait has just given us should be clear: what the Arab world needs is not ‘free elections’ but social and human progress. And the two are not necessarily linked...

The legislative elections of mid-May in Kuwait indeed ended in a significant breakthrough by the ‘radical Islamists’ of the **Salafist Islamist Alliance**, which won 10 seats out of 50 (twice as many as in the former assembly). Eleven of the other representatives elected belong to the Sunni radical movement, while the Shiite minority (30% of the population) is sending five Islamist deputies to Parliament. Two among them made themselves known by honouring the memory of the terrorist Imad Moughnieh, one of the ‘military leaders’ of Hezbollah who was killed in Damascus on February 12. Twenty-seven women were candidates in the elections but none was elected.

In a word, this was a great victory for democracy!

For those who still have doubts, this balloting underlines the extent to which Islamism is progressing in the Arab world. It should also give pause to those sorcerers’ apprentices who think it is possible nowadays to establish a representative democracy of the ‘Western’ type in this part of the world.

Many experiments in this sense have been tried over the past few years and they all ended up as cruel failures. In **Iraq**, the United States believed it was possible to impose ‘democracy’ from outside by means of force. The result is well known: the country is not able to extricate itself from the quasi-civil war that followed a brief period of euphoria after the fall of Saddam Hussein, and the Shiite extremists – some of whom are directly linked to Iran – are sitting in the Government. **The Palestinian Authority** was enjoined by the West to proceed with ‘democratic’ elections: **Hamas** won a crushing victory. Kuwait has just lived through the thrilling experience that we mentioned above. Even multi-faith **Lebanon** has been taken captive by its old demons and, after we feared the outbreak of a new civil war, **Hezbollah** won the test of strength: it is imposing its will on the Government and is keeping its arms. None of this has prevented Paris from hailing a ‘*great success for Lebanon*’ or Madam Rice from speaking of a ‘*constructive phase.*’ We have the victories we are capable of...

These parallel changes in countries which do not have the same history and do not experience the same socio-economic reality underline to what extent the imposition of our ‘model’ in the Arab world is just a pipe dream. **The Muslim Arab world is today profoundly sick: torn by tribalism and clan feuding which constitute its reality, it also has to deal with the deep-set disturbances that are sweeping the Islamic world.** That world is seeing a full-blown crisis between ‘the old men’ and the ‘modern men,’ all of which is mixed up with a feeling of humiliation in the broad public, where Islam is felt to be the victim of a new crusade and is expected to return to ‘the purity of its origins’ so as to regenerate itself and better resist against outside aggression.

Does this mean that all is lost and that there are no forces of progress in this part of the world? To be sure, no. Are we supposed to believe that progress is impossible there? It goes without saying: once again the answer is ‘no!’ However, **rather than push countries that are in no way prepared for it to wed and blindly apply our system, the Western powers – or what remains of them – should put aside for a while the question of**

fair electoral representation and insist more on social and human progress. More rights for women, recognition of the rights of ethnic, cultural and religious minorities, greater tolerance, a better sharing of wealth, a major effort in the area of education and access to knowledge, the creation and expansion of the middle classes : these are possible forms of progress. They do not result necessarily from the ballot box but can come from a dialogue between East and West.

If these conditions are fulfilled, they will perhaps make it possible, in future, for the Arab world to progress towards prosperity and to make a conscious choice of its own path of human and political development. On the contrary, if we attach ourselves wholly and despite everything to the slogan 'one man, one vote' – which does not signify anything at all in a tribal world – and make 'free elections' the unique measure of all change, that will lead only to greater disappointment, incomprehension and misfortune.

Are these politically incorrect thoughts? No doubt, but they are realistic.

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